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**Labour, Knowledge and Communication : Rethinking  
the Practical Content of Critical Social Theory**

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*July 2011*

Doctor of Philosophy  
*Social and Political Thought*

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**Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any degree.

**Signature:**

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Doctor of Philosophy

## Labour, Knowledge and Communication: Rethinking the Practical Content of Critical Social Theory

### *Summary*

In response to the reification of social reality caused, according to the first generation of the Frankfurt School, by the instrumental mastery of nature, Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse have elaborated a critique of instrumental reason aimed at providing the theoretical tools for a treatment of the social realm as a field of human practice. Concerned with the risks of reproducing the relationship between humanity and nature hindering human emancipation, they have nevertheless sought to limit the task of critical theory to a theoretical form of resistance, thereby divorcing social theory from the practical orientations found in Marx's critique of political economy. It was not until the works of second-generation critical theorist Jürgen Habermas, that one could find a renewed attempt to link theory with the objective conditions of existence thought to be required for human emancipation. With these theoretical developments, however, social theory was effectively stripped of its critique of technology, and became primarily concerned with the problem of human emancipation as a matter strictly regarding intersubjective relations. The present work proposes that the formulation of a social critique oriented towards the institutionalisation of emancipatory practice cannot presuppose or apologise for the instrumental mastery of external nature. It shall be argued that in order to achieve such a task, the critique of instrumental reason elaborated by the first generation of Frankfurt School theorists must be complemented and completed with the broad outline of an institutional framework capable of indicating the conditions of existence required for the actualisation of human emancipation as the labour-mediated reconciliation of humanity with both internal and external nature, and for which the works of G.D.H. Cole provide a potential basis for rethinking critical theory and updating libertarian socialism.

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## **Introduction**

‘Philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it’<sup>1</sup>

‘[T]he great transformation to which this century is moving [is] the reconciliation of mankind with nature and with itself’<sup>2</sup>

Under the modern age, humanity has witnessed an unprecedented level and speed of accumulation of wealth and technological development, both made possible by the rise of industry which marked a shift of attention “from nature as the source of marvels and new powers to the human instruments whereby these natural forces were discovered, integrated, and made serviceable for man’s purposes.”<sup>3</sup> Modernity’s material achievements are, in this sense, the products of a new relationship between humanity and external nature, namely the instrumental mastery of the latter by the former. However, can equally significant achievements be observed at the social level? More specifically, has the modern age fulfilled its own promises of autonomy, equality and justice for all?

Marx was among the first modern thinkers to assess the achievements of modernity. Although aware of the progressive character of this new phase of social development, he discovered significant social failures which he came to associate with the dominant form of economic organisation marking the new relationship between humanity and external nature, namely the capitalist mode of production. Whilst capitalism had led to an unprecedented pace of growth and technological development, it had failed to bring about the economic and political institutions whereby the direct producers, i.e. the majority of the population, could exert control over their conditions of existence and reap the due rewards of their work. The illusory heaven of the political community was all but a mirror of the exploitative and alienating character of the sphere of material reproduction. As a diagnosis exposing the social failures – and their (economic) causes – of modernity, therefore, his theoretical framework came to assume the form of a *social critique*. Its primary aim consisted in replacing the economic and

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<sup>1</sup> Marx, K. “Theses on Feuerbach” in McLellan, D. (2000) *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, p 171

<sup>2</sup> Engels, F. *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, 1844

<sup>3</sup> Leiss, W. (1972) *The Domination of Nature*, New York: George Braziller, p 76

political institutions that have prevented this new phase of social development from actualising autonomy, equality and justice for all. With Marx, then, one witnesses the emergence of a social theory primarily oriented towards a form of political action leading to the radical re-organisation of economic life, i.e. the collective control of production.<sup>4</sup> However, according to his later works, social change was not a merely desirable goal. It was also the inevitable consequence of the self-destructive dynamism of a form of capital accumulation relying upon the continuous expansion of productive forces. The relationship between humanity and external nature underpinning the capitalist mode of production would eventually liberate humanity from the fetters of wage-slavery. Marx's unity of theory and practice, therefore, appears to be tied to the instrumental mastery of external nature.

A few decades later, a school of thought heavily inspired by new intellectual and socio-historical developments came to question the viability of Marx's own social critique. The emergence of totalitarian regimes in Western and Eastern Europe combined with the development of capitalism into its "advanced" form, led the early generation of Frankfurt School theorists<sup>5</sup> to re-assess the achievements of modernity and the role of critique in an age whereby the prospects for social change appear as remote as they have ever been since modernity's inception. Drawing their inspiration from the social theories of Weber and Freud, they sought to expose the repressive mechanisms that had led to the emergence of such a state of affairs. Although clearly aware of the problematic character of capitalist production, they discovered that the development of the principle of self-preservation into a cultural and epistemological form effectively prompted the elaboration of a critique capable of recognising the role of knowledge in repression. With Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse, then, one witnesses a clear attempt to approach autonomy from the standpoint of the relationship between humanity and *internal* nature, and explain repression as the domination of the

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<sup>4</sup> It should nevertheless be noted here that, as Finlayson noted, the early Marx rejected the view according to which we ought to "confront the world as doctrinaires with a new principle" and stressed the important of "develop[ing] new principles for the world out of principles of the world." In this sense Marx's social critique could be said to remain within the confines of immanence. However, the task of developing "new principles" leading to the overthrow of the existing reality remains. Social critique, therefore, continues to be oriented towards a subversive form of practice. Finlayson, J.G. "Political, Moral and Critical Theory. On the Practical Philosophy of the Frankfurt School" in Rosen, M. and Leiter, B. (eds) (2008) *The Oxford Handbook of Continental Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p 640

<sup>5</sup> Whilst Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse are said to belong to this generation, also known as the "first generation" of critical theory, Habermas is said to be a member of the "second generation" of critical theory. See Finlayson, J.G. "Political, Moral and Critical Theory. On the Practical Philosophy of the Frankfurt School" in Rosen, M. and Leiter, B. (eds) (2008) *The Oxford Handbook of Continental Philosophy*

latter by the former, mediated by forms of property, state and consciousness, stemming from the relationship between humanity and *external* nature. Autonomy would therefore consist in the emancipation of the repressed, namely internal nature, from the instrumental form of rationality unfolding under the principle of self-preservation and causing humanity to raise itself out of nature whilst seeking to master its forces. As Leiss observed, the earlier generation of Frankfurt School theorists presented the form of knowledge oriented towards the mastery of external nature, i.e. technology, as “one of the means by which mastery of [external] nature is linked to mastery over man. [text added]”<sup>6</sup> With the critique of instrumental reason, then, one discovers that the prospects of human emancipation could no longer merely rely on the development of productive forces. Social critique could no longer trust practice:

Marx received the thesis of the primacy of practical reason from Kant and the German idealists, and he sharpened it into a challenge to change the world instead of merely interpreting it. He thus underwrote something as arch-bourgeois as the program of an absolute control of nature. What is felt here is the effort to make things unlike the subject and make them like the subject – the real model of the principle of identity, which dialectical materialism disavows as such.<sup>7</sup>

Marx’s apparent attempt to link theory with the bourgeois practice of the mastery of external nature prevented him from equipping his critique of political economy with the theoretical tools capable of identifying the repressive character of technology under the modern age. Thus, with the earlier generation of Frankfurt School theorists, the narrative of autonomy (as emancipation) remains central to theory, but is no longer tied to a specific project of political action oriented towards the institutionalisation of emancipatory practice. Emancipation, here, effectively becomes a strictly theoretical “force of resistance” aimed at negating the “technological domination” concealed by the reified social reality.<sup>8</sup> As such, social critique’s primary concern no longer consists in transcending the existing social reality. Instead, its task involves providing the theoretical tools with which individuals can treat society as a function “which originates in human action and therefore is a possible object of playful

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p 147

<sup>7</sup> Adorno, T.W. (1997) *Negative Dialectics*, New York: Continuum, p 244

<sup>8</sup> Adorno, T.W. “Resignation,” in Adorno, T.W. (1991) *The Culture Industry*, ed. J.M. Berstein, London: Routledge, pp 202-3. Under this guise, critique began to assume an “artistic” form. See *The New Spirit of Capitalism* by Boltanski and Chiapello for a detailed account of the distinction between “social” and “artistic” critiques.

decision and rational determination of goals.”<sup>9</sup> Having acquired, here, an immanent character, social critique can no longer be expected to anticipate the objective conditions of existence required for the actualisation of human emancipation.

The theoretical developments undertaken by second generation theorist Jürgen Habermas, however, have contributed to the revision of social critique’s practical content.<sup>10</sup> In his famous work entitled *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, for example, Habermas sought to draw some of the basic institutional contours capable of yielding autonomy. His nuanced praise of the Bourgeois public sphere emerging in the early stages of modernity did provide a somewhat clear indication of some of the institutional features thought to be suitable for the actualisation of autonomy. In his following works Habermas did nevertheless make it clear that although human emancipation must be understood as a phenomenon regarding the communicative practices of the “lifeworld,” it effectively depends on humanity’s emancipation *from* the forces of external nature through the latter’s instrumental mastery in the “system.” On the one hand, then, the theoretical developments undertaken by Habermas stripped critical theory of its critique of technology. On the other hand, he re-oriented critical theory towards matters of a normative nature thought to be regarding institutions and forms of social practice located outside the sphere of material reproduction. Habermas’s re-assessment of the link between theory and practice, therefore, could be understood as a renewed attempt to assign a prescriptive role to social critique, where the latter aims to explore the possible objective conditions for moral autonomy alongside the capitalist organisation of material reproduction. As such, his critical theory sought, like Marx’s own social critique, to explore the institutional conditions under which autonomy, justice and equality for all are possible, whilst both rejecting the need for a radical re-organisation of economic life and abandoning the critique of instrumental reason elaborated by the previous generation of Frankfurt School theorists.

The present work nevertheless proposes that *the formulation of a critical theory oriented towards the institutionalisation of emancipatory practice does not necessarily presuppose an apology for the instrumental mastery of external nature*. A revision of

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<sup>9</sup> Horkheimer, M. “Traditional and Critical Theory,” in Horkheimer, M. *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, New York: herder and Herder, p 207

<sup>10</sup> His work entitled *Theory and Practice* was Habermas’s most explicit attempt to rethink the link between theory and practice.

the practical content of critical theory may indeed succeed in combining the earlier generation's critique of instrumental reason with an insight into the objective conditions of existence required for human emancipation, thereby maximising critical theory's political impact in an age whereby both the actual and potential material and human costs resulting from the mastery of nature have gained a prominent significance in collective consciousness.<sup>11</sup>

In the first chapter of the present work I shall attempt to show that the aforementioned task ought to be undertaken by re-assessing Marx's own concept of labour. A close inspection of his early works, and particularly his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, will reveal that Marx had in fact developed a conception of autonomous practice presupposing a relationship between humanity and nature distinguishable from his predecessors – Kant and Hegel – and exhibiting an affinity with the conception of human emancipation *as reconciliation* defended by the earlier generation of critical theorists, and exposed in the second chapter. At this point, it shall be shown in what ways Marx's concept of labour as self-realisation could serve the function of mediating agent for the reconciliation of humanity and nature, and be combined with Adorno's critique of instrumental reason in such a way as realise the transformative potential of critical theory.

In the third chapter, I shall seek to expose the compatibility of the unity of critical theory with a practical content oriented towards the institutionalisation of emancipatory practice. It shall be argued that whilst the transformative potential of critical theory derives from the principle of negativity, its realisation effectively depends on giving the utopian content unleashed by the latter its due. Whilst such a task was partly undertaken by Jürgen Habermas, chapter four will seek to demonstrate that the prospects of the reconciliation of humanity with itself rest, contra the second-generation theorist, upon a re-organisation of the relationship between humanity and external nature. Consequently, the dependence of communicative practices upon subject-object relations must be recognised. The task set out in chapter five shall, in this sense, consist in both exposing the problems posed by Habermas's theory of communicative action,

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<sup>11</sup> Climate change science has significantly contributed to the increasing awareness of the human causes of environmental problems. In the academic world, Beck's *Risk Society* (1992) represents a major turning point, for it introduced such concerns into mainstream sociological thinking. A plethora of texts addressing such issues have been published since then. See, for example, Redclift's and Benton's *Social Theory and the Global Environment* (1994), Martell's *Ecology and Society* (1994), and Bellamy Foster's *Ecology Against Capitalism* (2000).

and exploring the theoretical premises for the conceptualisation of non-manipulative subject-object relations.

In the last two chapters, a case for an alignment of critical theory with the libertarian socialist institutional framework elaborated by G.D.H. Cole will be made. In chapter six, the elective affinity between the broad theoretical orientations of the earlier generation of Frankfurt School theorists and Cole's social and political theory will be exposed. The next, and final chapter of the thesis, shall serve to demonstrate the suitability of the latter's institutional framework for the task of reconciliation, and to present it as both the appropriate insight into the objective conditions of existence required for human emancipation, and the culmination of the theoretical reconstruction oriented towards the realisation of critical theory's transformative potential. It must nevertheless be noted here that the attempt to link the broad theoretical orientations of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School with Cole's own work is not new.<sup>12</sup> However, whilst previous attempts to establish such a link have tended to concentrate on the possibility of institutionalising the Frankfurt School's approach to emancipation as reconciliation from a libertarian socialist standpoint, the author of the present work shall proceed with the more specific task of proposing that such a project requires the re-conceptualisation of Marx's concept of labour into a form of practice capable of mediating humanity and nature (*both* internal and external).

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<sup>12</sup> See Darrow Schecter's *Beyond Hegemony* (2005).

## **Chapter 1**

### From Autonomy to Human Emancipation: the Mediating Function of Labour as Self-realisation

Marx's work has often been treated as somewhat continuous with the conception of autonomy first formulated by Enlightenment thinkers such as Kant.<sup>1</sup> The practice of autonomy Marx is often thought to advocate has, in this sense, been associated with humanity's mastery of both internal and external forces of nature. The present chapter shall nevertheless seek to demonstrate that, in sharp contrast with orthodox interpretations of his work, Marx's concept of labour provides a potential basis upon which a concept of practice oriented towards the *mediated non-identity* of humanity and nature can be formulated.

#### ***Idealism, Autonomy, and the Mediated Unity of Humanity and Nature***

Kant's most explicit formulation of the conditions for autonomous practice can be found in his essay entitled *What is Enlightenment?* In it he describes enlightenment as a condition whereby one is able "to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another."<sup>2</sup> Individuals can only expect to realise their freedom once they have developed the capacity to "think for themselves."<sup>3</sup> For Kant, the problem of autonomy begins with an investigation of the conditions under which humanity's emancipation from the fetters of nature and other external forces, and ends with the "freedom to make public use of one's reason."<sup>4</sup> The capacity to think rationally is central. It is not only inseparable from, but also a precondition of autonomy. Despite

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<sup>1</sup> Adorno's own stance can be said to characterise the orthodox interpretations of Marx's work, namely those emphasising the continuity between the latter's approach to the relationship between humanity and Kant's. In *Negative Dialectics*, for example, he charged Marx for advocating the "absolute control of nature." Adorno, T.W. *Negative Dialectics*, p 244

<sup>2</sup> Kant, I. *What is Enlightenment?*, in Reiss, H. (1991) *Kant: Political Writings*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p 54

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p 55

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p 55

such a heavy emphasis on reason, Kant wished to demonstrate that that neither the purpose of his task nor his conclusions could be compared to the rationalist tradition of epistemology.

Central to Kant's "Copernican Revolution" was the demonstration that epistemology should cease to seek the origins of knowledge in either humanity or nature, and move beyond the antagonism between pure rational thinking and sensory perception.<sup>5</sup> Epistemology could no longer limit itself to the task of investigating the origins of knowledge *per se*. In order to satisfy the demands of autonomous practice, epistemology had to realign its goals to include within its scope concerns regarding the conditions under which knowledge becomes possible. Such a realignment, Kant believed, should begin with the recognition of the fact that humanity is both part of, and distinct from nature. Rather than dismissing the realm of sensory experience as unworthy participant in knowledge, the Kantian conception of autonomous thinking accepts the existence of contradictory – "sensible" and "intelligible" – forces in the constitution of knowledge, and seeks to mediate them. However the transcendental subject, in possession of a transhistorical rational faculty now seeking to master the chaotic impulses of sense-perception, cannot claim to know the "things in themselves" (noumena). It must accept that any attempt to "think for oneself" is limited to the knowledge of things as they appear (phenomena). In order to present themselves to the "twelve categories of the understanding" and thus acquire validity in the constitution of knowledge, the sensuous objects must subject themselves to the rule of reason, whose function is to prepare such objects for their synthesis with the understanding, and eventually turn them into reliable representations, i.e. the actual substance of *rational experience*. Failure to do so would deny knowledge its contradictory character by effecting a return to the relativism of empirical experience, thus reducing humanity to nature. Kant's investigation of the conditions under which knowledge is possible consisted of a reassessment of the relationship between concepts and senses, between humanity and nature. He found that rather than acting as two distinct sources of representation, they in fact belonged to a single epistemological foundation, but that in order to hold the chaotic nature of the subjective phantasy in check, and convert the raw energy of sense perception into a constructive component of autonomy, the senses had to be brought under the control of reason. Thus, according to Kant, the prospects of

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<sup>5</sup> It is indeed the self-proclaimed task of his first critique – the *Critique of Pure Reason* – to revolutionise epistemology by overcoming the antagonism between rationalism and empiricism.



autonomous thinking rest on reason's capacity to mediate the forces of humanity and nature.

The realisation of such a form of autonomy in practice does nevertheless depend upon further conditions. As was mentioned above, one must be capable of making public use of one's reason. For Kant, this refers to "that use which anyone may make of it as a *man of learning* addressing the entire *reading public*."<sup>6</sup> Conditions must be such that all enlightened individuals have the opportunity to comment on the public affairs of a given society and political community. In order to become a member of the "public sphere,"<sup>7</sup> and be in a position to question and eventually subvert the power in place, however, one must first develop one's own conception of the common good. This, Kant argued, can be achieved only by fulfilling one's "duty" as a public person. Under this "absolute law of reason,"<sup>8</sup> the potentially chaotic spontaneity of the will would be held in check. One would indeed be encouraged to act according to clearly defined motivations, be inclined to subsume individual happiness under motives of a universal nature, thus equipping citizens with a constant capacity to make decisions in line with the common good and ultimately providing the conditions required for the universal exercise of autonomous practice. The presence of a public sphere, in other words, ensures that the principle whereby "*the freedom of each can co-exist with the freedom of all others*,"<sup>9</sup> itself embodied in the laws of the state, governs the actions of individuals and, as such, serves as a key condition for the practice of autonomous thinking. By allowing sense-experience to be legislated by reason, Kant's mediation of humanity and nature also favours the satiation of those faculties capable of protecting the former against its dependence on the latter's forces,<sup>10</sup> thereby treating sensations and other

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<sup>6</sup> Kant, I. *What is Enlightenment?*, p 55

<sup>7</sup> This term was coined by Habermas with reference to Kant's own conception of "publicity" in his work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

<sup>8</sup> Kant, I. "On the Common Saying : 'This may be true in theory, but it does not apply in practice,'" in Reiss, H. (1991) *Kant: Political Writings*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p 67

<sup>9</sup> Kant, I. "The Metaphysics of Morals," in Reiss, H. (1991) *Kant: Political Writings*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p 191

<sup>10</sup> Kant's distinction between autonomy and heteronomy is key to grasping the mediating role played by reason. While he understood the former as a condition whereby the independence of the will is secured when desires and other inclinations are legislated by reason, he described the latter as a state of affairs where the will is under the influence of forces independent of our control, such as natural inclinations, or, the will. Kant presented such a legislating role of reason in autonomy as a moral "duty" which "is nothing more than a *limitation* of the will within a universal legislation" Kant, I. "On the Common Saying : 'This may be true in theory, but it does not apply in practice,'" p 65

“natural” inclinations as potential obstacles to autonomous thinking.<sup>11</sup> Autonomy, as a result, becomes synonymous with the rational mastery of forces of internal and external nature, a condition of existence equated to a liberation *through* thought relying on both a transhistorical and purely subjective conception of reason.

According to Hegel, however, such a state of affairs could only emerge as the culmination of a historical process of self-creation. Whilst Hegel maintains that knowledge is constituted through the interplay of contradictory forces, and presents the rational will as the fundamental component of “self-determination,” he makes several key adjustments to the Kantian concept of enlightenment. With Hegelian idealism, rational thinking no longer stands as a fixed faculty of the mind freeing individuals from the fetters of tutelage whilst securing the peaceful coexistence of autonomous wills through self-imposed limitations (duty). Instead, “absolute knowledge”<sup>12</sup> emerges as the culmination of the historical unfolding of “spirit” (*Geist*) which, following a process of externalisation and re-appropriation between individuals’ determinate existence and their essence, eventually finds refuge in the rational laws of the state as the moment of “absolute freedom.” The individual, now acquiring his/her freedom through the recognition of the fact that “the real is rational, [and] the rational is real,” can expect to engage in autonomous practice only when reason “transforms thought into an existent thought, or being into a thought-constituted being”.<sup>13</sup> Hegel’s liberation *in* thought, therefore, may only be possible under historically specific socio-political institutions, but echoes Kant’s emphasis on reason as the mediating agent of humanity and nature, only this time by assuming the form of objective substance embodied in historically specific socio-political institutions. In his work *The Philosophy of Right* Hegel famously claimed that self-determination would be most effectively secured by a political institution like the state. The state is the “ethical Idea,” the objective substance of reason as spirit, and the moment of identity between the self-conscious subject and its re-appropriated essence. As such, the state is the embodiment of the subject’s will and the so-called rational character of its laws serves to secure the free, competitive, yet harmonious, self-interested satisfaction of needs taking place in the sphere of civil

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<sup>11</sup> The term “natural” used here refers to both external and internal nature. Kant’s liberation from nature is not only a liberation from the *external* forces of nature but, more generally, from those forces *independent of our control*. Desires, and other forms of “natural” inclinations do therefore fit into the definition.

<sup>12</sup> In contrast to Kant, Hegel believed that one could know the “things in themselves” but thought that this absolute form of knowledge could only be attained under particular socio-historical conditions.

<sup>13</sup> Hegel, G.W.F. (1961) *The Phenomenology of Mind*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, George Allen and Unwin: London: p 283

society.<sup>14</sup> Its abstraction from, and protection of, civil society and the family allow it to create the most favourable conditions for the self-conscious determination and realisation of particular ends within society at large. The laws of the state, in this sense, not only embody the concept of absolute freedom, they are also the conditions for its actualisation.

A key concern for the idealist thinker – one that is echoed in the works of his predecessor Kant – revolved around the resolution of the riddle caused by the coexistence of particular and potentially conflicting wills. The two German philosophers were aware that both the determination and the realisation of an individual's particular ends could not be taking place in isolation from other individuals. Whereas for Kant such a problem is resolved by the limitation that one imposes on one's will (duty) in one's role as a public person (citizen), for Hegel the solution lies in the particular individual's recognition of the "welfare of others" as a precondition of the realisation of his or her own ends.<sup>15</sup> For the latter philosopher, individuals seeking to realise their ends as members of civil society must therefore treat the will of others as a *constitutive part of their own*.<sup>16</sup> Only this way can the universal content of the will be expressed and serve as a basis for the collective satisfaction of needs. Such conditions cannot be met, however, by merely calling onto the subjectivity of the will. Doing so would indeed mean leaving the realisation of particular ends to the arbitrary and chaotic rule of phantasy, and undermine the possibilities for a peaceful coexistence of individual wills. The orderly satisfaction of needs would instead be secured by the objective moment of the will which Hegel thought to be embodied within the laws of the state. As spirit, reason would, as in the case of Kant, mediate the actions of individuals. In the Hegelian system, however, the manifestation of reason does not limit itself to the channelling of the raw energy of sensory experience through the isolated action of an individual but crucially depends upon the *recognition* of other individuals' wills as a precondition of one's own.

According to Hegel, individuals may be in a position to *determine* their own ends – as the subjective moment of freedom – but can only expect to *realise* these ends as beings fully conscious of their role as members of the "family," "civil society," and the "state." Whereas the development of the "subjective needs" of the

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<sup>14</sup> Hegel also called civil society the "system of needs." See *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*.

<sup>15</sup> Part three of Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* contains his most explicit account of this point.

<sup>16</sup> This is precisely what Hegel meant by "being-at-home-in-another"

individual will already depends on the mere existence of “external things” such as “the *property* and product of the needs and *wills* of others,”<sup>17</sup> their satisfaction can take place only once such external things have been *recognised*, or as Hegel put it, “negated,” as integral components of a person’s will. In the relationship between a slave and a master, for example, the formal independence of the latter as a being driven by desires heavily depends on the labour of the former to realise such drives. Similarly, as the material form of the slave’s capacities, the object of labour is the external confirmation of his or her individuality. Both parties can nevertheless expect to move closer to their spiritual independence (self-consciousness) only once “each is for the other what the other is for it,”<sup>18</sup> once each party recognises the other as the externalised form of their own individuality, with, on the one hand, the master conscious of his dependence upon the powers of another and, on the other hand, the slave realising “that it is precisely in his work wherein he seemed to have only an alienated existence that he acquires a mind of his own.”<sup>19</sup> The subject’s conscious re-appropriation of its objectified self (self-consciousness) is the next and ultimate step towards the actualisation of self-determination. It is the stage whereby, as the embodiment of the universality of the will, the rational laws of the state accommodate the various particular wills so that each conscious individual (“being with oneself”) recognises the other as his or her externalised self (“being with oneself in another”), and the totality of the social order as a realm of human practice.

While Kant addressed reason as a *subjective faculty* freeing individuals from the fetters of nature and other forms of dependence, and located the basic conditions for autonomy in a *ahistorical* mediation of humanity and nature, Hegel believed the latter conditions to be found in a historically specific stage marked by the *intersubjective recognition* of the laws of the state as the “substantial will.”<sup>20</sup> Drawing his inspiration from his reading of Feuerbach, however, the young Marx expressed serious doubts about the capacity of the latter socio-political model to provide individuals with the necessary form of freedom for autonomous practice. Although an advocate of Hegel’s historicised reading of the dialectics of humanity and nature, he was keen to expose the problems associated with their mediation by the state. For him, such a mediating role

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<sup>17</sup> Hegel, G.W.F. (1991) *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Wood, A. W. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p 227

<sup>18</sup> Hegel, G.W.F. (1977) *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p 113

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p 119

<sup>20</sup> Hegel, G.W.F. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p 275

could not be performed by the abstract laws of such an institution, and would have to be found, instead, within the economic base of society.

### *Labour as Mediation*

Marx is well known for writing some of the most famous of his early works as a form of critique of idealist philosophy, and more particularly of Hegel's own system of thought.<sup>21</sup> In these same works, however, can also be found passages in which Marx more or less explicitly acknowledges his debt to the German philosopher. In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, for example, he made the following remark:

the greatness of Hegel's *Phenomenology* and its final product, the dialectic of negativity as the moving and creating principle, is on the one hand that Hegel conceives of the self-creation of man as a process, objectification as loss of the object, as externalisation and the transcendence of this externalisation. This means, therefore, that he grasps the nature of labour and understands objective man, true, because real, man as a result of his own labour. The real, active relationship of man to himself as a species-being or the manifestation of himself as a real species-being, i.e. as a human being, is only possible if he uses all his species powers to create (which is again only possible through the cooperation of man and as a result of history), if he relates himself to them as objects, which can only be done at first in the form of alienation.<sup>22</sup>

Although Kant, in his attempt to find the conditions under which knowledge is possible, had already re-conceptualised the subject's relation to the world of objects, Marx thought that it was not until Hegel that the most fundamental dynamics of such a relation had been discovered. Marx was particularly seduced by Hegel's approach to the subject as a being endowed with an objective existence. From the *Phenomenology of Spirit* onwards, the prospects of autonomy would no longer rest on a world of objects mastered and dialectically mediated by the subject's rational faculty (subjective man), but would instead depend on the subject's recognition of this world as the objective manifestation of the subject's very own powers (objective man), and consequently allow this same subject to gain consciousness of this same world as a realm of human

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<sup>21</sup> Some of the works referred to here are "On the Jewish Question," "Towards a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," and the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*.

<sup>22</sup> Marx, K. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, in McLellan, D. (2000) *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p 109

practice. Marx was in fact keen to praise Hegel for grasping autonomy as a condition realised through subjectively and *objectively* mediated forms of practice. Like Hegel, therefore, Marx construed the development of the individual as a process of creation whereby “all objects become for him the objectification of himself. They are objects that confirm and realise his individuality, his own objects, i.e. he becomes an object himself.”<sup>23</sup>

Like Hegel, then, Marx conceived of self-creation as a process involving both a stage of estrangement and one of re-appropriation. He nevertheless expressed serious doubts regarding Hegel’s own approach to the latter stage.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, as was explained by the idealist philosopher, re-appropriation would take place through a process of recognition regulated by the rational laws of the state whose embodied universality acts as the substance required for the subject to become conscious of the limited freedom gained from the objectification of its own essence, and subsequently consider the abolition of such alienation as a condition for the realisation of absolute freedom. For Hegel, it meant recognising the external world as the subject’s “other,” a condition perceived as thoroughly problematic by Marx who, inspired by Feuerbach’s *The Essence of Christianity*, expressed doubts regarding the predominant role the former thinker assigned to subjectivity in human practice. Leaving the task of abolishing alienation to the mere activity of the mind indeed means that the “appropriation of man’s objectified and alienated faculties is [...] only an appropriation that occurs [...] in pure thought, i.e. in abstraction.”<sup>25</sup> In the last instance, the actualisation of self-determination does not require the subject to abolish the existing social, political and economic conditions of existence. For example, the state, as the objective moment of the subject’s freedom, need only be thought as the subject’s externalised essence for the laws to acquire validity and the process of intersubjective recognition to come to fruition. If Hegel ultimately reduced the reconciliation of essence and existence to a mere activity of the mind, however, it is because he approached the relation between humanity and nature from the standpoint of “abstract, mental labour,” from a process of objectification whereby the individual producer *fails to confirm himself or herself practically*. Hegel does indeed fail to see or at least account for the fact that, as the institutional expression of a non-autonomous form of practice, namely alienated labour,

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<sup>23</sup> Marx, K. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p 101

<sup>24</sup> As will be made more explicit below, Marx also questioned Hegel’s own approach to alienation.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p 108

the reconciliation of the particularity of concrete existence and the universality of the abstracted essence cannot take place unless their separation is abolished practically. Thus, whilst Marx acknowledged the fact that the mediation of the particular existence and the universal essence of the modern individual by the rational laws of the state, marked the advent of a distinctively new and more advanced stage in the development of human capacities, he rejected the Hegelian argument according to which “supersession in thought [...] lets its object remain in reality [but] believes it has really overcome it.”<sup>26</sup> The ultimately subjective nature of re-appropriation led him to dismiss the mediating role of the abstract laws of the state as a justification for the self-interested particularism of the immediate existence characterising bourgeois societies, and denied this historically specific “true” and “concrete” form of life the possibility to be reconciled with its universal essence. According to Marx, the project of an actual reconciliation of essence and existence, of “real, practical emancipation” does not end with the abstraction of the state from civil society or “political emancipation,” and thus cannot be found within the socio-political institutions of the bourgeois order.<sup>27</sup> Instead, such a project depends on the following conditions:

The actual individual man must take the abstract citizen back into himself and, as an individual man in his empirical life, in his individual work and individual relationships become a species-being; man must recognize his own forces as social forces, organize them, and thus no longer separate social forces from himself in the form of political forces. Only when this has been achieved will human emancipation be completed.<sup>28</sup>

With Marx, then, autonomy becomes synonymous with “human emancipation.” But if the prospects of human emancipation depend on the objective abolition of alienation how, then, does Marx envisage the mediation of the political community and civil society? What form of human practice can allow the individual to “take the abstract citizen back into himself”? To answer such questions one has to turn to his concept of “species-being.”

In his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* Marx, like Kant and Hegel before him, sought to extract the conditions for autonomy from the mediated relation between the universality of essence and the particularity of existence. However, whilst

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p 116

<sup>27</sup> Marx, K. “On the Jewish Question,” in McLellan, D. (2000) *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, p 54. It is with Marx that autonomy becomes inseparable from emancipation.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p 64

the two idealist philosophers ultimately left the task of mediation to the synthetic activity of reason (Kant) or to the historical unfolding of the “concept” (Hegel), Marx re-conceptualised practice in line with his effort to turn the process of re-appropriation into a form of action bearing real consequences for the objective world. In his materialist schema, humanity remains a part of nature while consciously making it the object of its self-formative activity. As the “inorganic body of man,”<sup>29</sup> however, nature is both the object and the subject of practice. It is an “immense material” transformed by human powers, “but also a potential” dialectically realised by nature’s transfer into the products of such an activity.<sup>30</sup> As a result, it is outside the abstract realm of the state and into the productive sphere of labour that Marx envisaged to reconcile humanity’s essence with its existence.

Universality could no longer remain an illusory reality, the exclusive content of a political community abstracted from the “sensuous, individual, immediate existence” of the member of civil society.<sup>31</sup> With Marx, the state becomes the necessary companion<sup>32</sup> to an insufficiently emancipatory “vital activity.”<sup>33</sup> It is the institutionalised form of a *problematic* relation between humanity and nature; a mere transitory stage in the development of human powers that Hegel had been capable of grasping only in positive terms. For Marx, it is in the active process of self-creation mediating humanity and nature (the economy) that the individual finds the means to “relate[...] to himself as to a universal and therefore free being.”<sup>34</sup> Through an activity in which he makes “*practically* and theoretically [...] both his own and other species into his objects [*italics added*]”<sup>35</sup> the individual acquires the capacity to recognise the products of labour “*as examples* of the kind,”<sup>36</sup> thus “relat[ing] to himself as to the present, living species”<sup>37</sup> and obtaining confirmation of his universal essence within the sphere of labour itself.

Whilst Marx praised Hegel for grasping autonomy as the product of a historical process culminating in the *unity of the subject and the object*, the former located the

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<sup>29</sup> Marx, K. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p 90

<sup>30</sup> Schmidt, A. (1971) *The Concept of Nature in Marx*, London: NLB, p 162

<sup>31</sup> Marx, K. “On the Jewish Question,” p 64

<sup>32</sup> In “On the Jewish Question,” Marx claimed that “the perfection of the idealism of the state was at the same time the perfection of the materialism of civil society,” thus pointing out the contradictory, yet mutually necessary, relation between the two spheres, p 63

<sup>33</sup> Marx, K. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p 90

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p 89

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p 89

<sup>36</sup> Chitty, A. “The Early Marx on Needs,” *Radical Philosophy* no. 64, May 1993, p 24

<sup>37</sup> Marx, K. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p 89



agent of mediation of such a unity in a form of human practice to be found beyond the confines of Hegel's own pinnacle of human development. Autonomy, now conceived of as human emancipation, would no longer manifest itself as a mere product of the mind, but would instead begin to signify the realisation of capacities one possesses in virtue of one's being a *member of the human species*.

### ***Autonomy as Human Emancipation***

According to the two idealist philosophers, the prospects of autonomy ultimately depended upon individuals' capacity to allow their actions to be freely governed by reason, i.e. *act rationally*; a force manifesting itself either subjectively, as the quintessential human faculty, or objectively, through laws of a state acting as the embodiment of an individual's will, thus restricting the emancipation of humanity from the fetters of nature and tutelage to the free development of a set of cognitive faculties. The significance of the industrial age for the development of what came to be known as specifically human faculties, was also central to Marx's works. For him, the age of progress was characterised by "relationships [that] are no longer determined by nature but are *set up* by society,"<sup>38</sup> and by the fact that, for the first time in its history, humanity could begin to contemplate "making its own and other species into its objects." Capitalism, in fact, marked the advent of a new relation between humanity and nature:

Industry is the real historical relationship of nature, and therefore of natural science, to man. If then it is conceived of as the open revelation of human faculties, then the human essence of nature or the natural essence of man will also be understood. Natural science will then lose its one-sidedly materialist, or rather idealistic, orientation and become the basis of human science as it has already, though in alienated form, become the basis of actual human life.<sup>39</sup>

At least three key elements can be observed here. Firstly, Marx attempted to draw attention to the fact that the rise of the capitalist mode of production signifies a radical break with all previous relations between humanity and nature. Whilst, prior to it, the development of the human species had remained dependent upon the contingency

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<sup>38</sup> Schmidt, A. *The Concept of Nature in Marx*, p 178

<sup>39</sup> Marx, K. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p 102

of natural forces, the emergence of capital and the corresponding introduction of new methods of production meant that “[n]ature bec[ame] for the first time an object for mankind,”<sup>40</sup> and the latter a species finally acquiring the technical means to emancipate itself from the bonds of nature. However, the emergence of scientific knowledge and the achievement of an unprecedented growth in productive forces made possible by the mediation of both natural and human forces, do not by themselves create conditions entirely favourable for human emancipation, or, as Marx put it, for the realisation of “natural science as the basis of actual human life.” This brings us to the second point.

While Marx recognised that the intellectual and material wealth generated by capitalist methods of production marked a breakthrough in the history of human development, he was much less enthusiastic regarding the conditions under which such wealth was being accumulated. Capitalism, he thought, may have developed the technology necessary for the mastery of the forces of nature, but the introduction of the wage-system also meant that the immediate producer’s capacity to produce freely, and therefore consciously would be jeopardised. Indeed, as soon as workers are forced to sell their labour to another person in order to have access to the basic means of subsistence, their relation to both the product and the activity performed for its creation tend to alter. No longer in control of the labour process, and with an activity performed as a means rather than an end in itself, the worker is forced to seek the confirmation of his essence in a sphere outside labour. Now only capable of satisfying his needs indirectly, he confronts both labour and the product created therefrom as moments external to the needs themselves, or “alien” moments, and comes to experience objectification as alienation, “a loss of reality.”<sup>41</sup> By denying the labourer the means to confirm his essence, his “vital activity” turns him into “a purely subjective force without objective existence.”<sup>42</sup> As a result, and in order to achieve autonomy, humanity must not only master the forces of nature through labour. Individual producers must

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<sup>40</sup> Marx, K. *Grundrisse*, in McLellan, D. (2000) *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p 398

<sup>41</sup> Marx, K. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p 86. Marx’s and Hegel’s own uses of the term alienation deserve clarification here. The section of the *Phenomenology* entitled “Lordship and Bondage” is often cited as the text from which Marx draws his inspiration for the concept of alienation and the mechanisms involved in its abolition. However, as C.J. Arthur pointed out, “Marx does not mention, and does not draw upon, the dialectic of ‘lordship and bondage’.” Of the three sections he mentions as evidence for ‘critical elements’ in Hegel’s work, the most influential is ‘the struggle of noble and base consciousness’. Here Hegel treats of the estrangement of the individual from social institutions such as state power and wealth. As always, Marx finds in Hegel that the idealist exposition of such elements of criticism results in their presentation still in estranged form.” Arthur, C.J. (1986) *Dialectics of Labour*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p 92

<sup>42</sup> Schmidt, A. *The Concept of Nature in Marx*, p 175

also be in a position to create the *sensuous objects* that will confirm their essence as members of the human species.

As a third key point made by Marx in the passage above can be found the notion that the process whereby humanity appropriates nature acts as a source for “real historical relationship of nature to man” only by allowing the individual to realise the “open revelation of human faculties.” Labour, if performed under the right conditions, would mediate the unity of humanity and nature as an activity serving the development of a wide range of capacities through the transformation of nature. However, Marx’s early works rather inconsistently address the form assumed by the relationship between humanity and nature in question, and tend to approach it from two more or less distinguishable angles. The first thesis running through his works was developed in conjunction with the distinction he made between the animal and the human species:

It is true that the animal, too, produces. It builds itself a nest, a dwelling, like the bee, the beaver, the ant, etc. But it only produces what it needs immediately for itself or its offspring; it produces one-sidedly whereas man produces universally; it produces only under the pressure of immediate physical need, whereas man produces freely from physical need and only truly produces when he is thus free; it produces only itself whereas man reproduces the whole of nature. Its product belongs immediately to its physical body whereas man can freely separate himself from his product. The animal only fashions things according to the standards and needs of the species it belongs to, whereas man knows how to produce according to the measure of every species and knows everywhere how to apply its inherent standard to the object; thus man also fashions things according to the laws of beauty.<sup>43</sup>

To be human here means, once again, being capable of making nature the object of human practice, of transforming nature in a manner suitable for the development of what Marx thought to be an exclusively human quality, namely consciousness. Hence humans do not merely produce, they *create*. Their capacity to think (cognition) means that through labour, they do not only produce the objects that will satisfy basic needs such as “eating, drinking and procreating,”<sup>44</sup> but also find an outlet for the expression of their creativity and the satisfaction of their highly sophisticated needs. Thus, insofar as they allow human beings to make nature into an object of human practice, cognitive faculties perform a central role in the realisation of autonomy. For this reason, the rise of industry marks a turning point in the development of humanity’s transformative

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<sup>43</sup> Marx, K. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, pp 90-1

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p 89

capacities. However, as suggested by his emphasis on the creative role of truly human practice, and his call for human emancipation, Marx's approach to autonomy cannot be understood merely in terms of either an independence from external forces made possible by the cognitive faculty of reason (Kant), or a political emancipation ultimately reducing the scope of self-determination to the one-sided development of cognitive faculties (Hegel). Human emancipation, instead, assumes the form of a process of *self-realisation* aimed at the "complete emancipation of all human senses and qualities."<sup>45</sup> Thus, inspired by Feuerbach's materialist critique of religion and his attempt to restore the significance of humanity's sensuous existence in philosophical thinking,<sup>46</sup> Marx believed sense-experience to be playing a central role in emancipation. He insisted that, in virtue of his being a creative creature with the capacity to feel as well as think, "man is affirmed in the objective world not only in thought but *through all his senses* [italics added]."<sup>47</sup> Labour-mediated practice, therefore, not only frees humanity from the fetters of nature, but also realises a human essence whose content expands well beyond the confines delimited by cognitive faculties. The "real relationship of man to nature" thus involves a process through which the same activity making the latter the *object* of the former, also serves the development of a *multiplicity* of human faculties, both cognitive and sensuous.<sup>48</sup>

After careful examination of Marx's materialism, man's relationship to nature does nevertheless begin to acquire an additional dimension. Indeed, while nature is in most places presented as an object of human practice, Marx also makes several utterances pointing towards a more active role for natural forces:

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the active side was developed abstractly by idealism – which, of course, does not know real,

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p 100

<sup>46</sup> See Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*

<sup>47</sup> Marx, K. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p 101

<sup>48</sup> It is in fact this particular side of Marx's approach to the relation of humanity and nature that tends to be overlooked in Habermas's early critique of historical materialism. As will be shown in chapter four, although his call for a critique of knowledge does seem to justify a critical reading of Marx's works, he failed to address labour as a process of sensuous self-realisation, thus overlooking the non-instrumental relation between humanity and nature found in these same works.

sensuous activity as such. Feuerbach wants sensuous objects really distinct from the thought objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as objective activity.<sup>49</sup>

Here, understood in terms of both cognition and sensuousness, the term “human” echoes the all-encompassing meaning so far discussed. The key message Marx intends to convey in this passage, however, takes the form of a clarification of his conception of sensuousness. As a feature of the human essence, sensuousness already performed a central role. However, it is as sense-experience *in general* that Marx, here, wishes to present the “active side” of objects. Since “directly sensuous nature for man is man’s sense-experience (the expressions are identical),” the potentialities of both nature and humanity are realised through one and the same process.<sup>50</sup> Thus, by treating the internal nature of humanity and external nature as “identical expressions,” Marx does not actually invert Hegel’s subject-object relation through Feuerbach’s materialism but, rather, shows that the “real relationship of man to nature” must also be understood as a relation of man to his own, individual essence. In other words, while the first thesis distinguishes a relation between man and external nature from the relation between man and his own, the second sees nature as “non-ontological,” or, as Schmidt also put it, as “socially mediated,” and thus understands nature as another *subject* in human emancipation.

Central to Marx, and in accord with the idealist conception of autonomy, was his concern for humanity’s independence from the forces of nature. Like Kant and Hegel, Marx saw modernity as an era whereby the human species would, for the first time in development, turn nature into its own object, thus gaining the technical means to make its own history. However, while the idealist philosophers have tended to construct autonomous practice out of an *asymmetrical unity* understood either as a subjection of nature to the legislative power of cognitive faculties (Kant), or as a “thought-constituted being” (Hegel), Marx’s call for human emancipation gave natural forces a more significant role to play in autonomy. A case can in fact be made for an interpretation of Marx’s conception of autonomy as *ecological human emancipation*.<sup>51</sup> A problem nevertheless arises when one observes that not one, but two approaches to this unity can

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<sup>49</sup> Marx, K. “Theses on Feuerbach,” in McLellan, D. (2000) *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p 171

<sup>50</sup> Marx, K. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p 102

<sup>51</sup> The ecological content of Marx’s work has already been revealed by, for example, Ted Benton in *Natural Relations: Ecology, Animal Rights and Social Justice* and *The Greening of Marxism*, as well as by John Bellamy Foster in *Marx’s Ecology*.

in fact be found in his works. Indeed, how can he safely defend the view that on the one hand, the emancipation of humanity from the fetters of nature depends on the subjugation of the latter by the former whilst, on the other hand, arguing that human and natural sense-experience are identical?<sup>52</sup> In order to be in a position to resolve this apparent contradiction, one must first investigate a last key element of Marx's concept of human essence, namely communality.

### *On the Social Character of Human Emancipation*

In the first section of the present chapter it was briefly pointed out that central to the idealist project of autonomous practice could be found a concern for the socially cohesive character of rational thinking. Whereas Kant's warning against the dangers of tutelage suggests that autonomy manifests itself through a form of freedom exercised *independently of* other individuals, Hegel's philosophy of recognition appears to embody a conception of enlightenment that not only accepts the contingency of freedom upon the presence of other individuals, but turns those individuals into the very *condition* of autonomous practice. It is out of this latter (Hegelian) conception of autonomy, one grounded in a form of freedom consciously exercised *through* others, that Marx would draw the inspiration for his own solution to the individual-society riddle.

Like Hegel, Marx regarded the labour process as a key phenomenon in the realisation of autonomy. Both did indeed present the objectification of human powers as the material basis upon which the individual producer would, provided he can recognise the product as the external form of his individuality, eventually "become[...] conscious of what he truly is,"<sup>53</sup> and thus understood it as a necessary step in the development of the capacity to "think for oneself." But since modern forms of production are undertaken under the principle of exchange rather than immediate consumption, they do not merely satisfy the individual producer's very own needs. Through exchange, the products of labour also become objects that will meet another person's needs. They are endowed with the purpose of serving the development of the species as a whole, and as

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<sup>52</sup> Habermas, who throughout his so-called "reconstruction of historical materialism," failed to report on the second thesis, founded his own critique of knowledge upon a distinction already present in Marx's works. See Chapter four.

<sup>53</sup> Hegel, G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p 118

such perform a central function in the process of realisation of both the individual and the communal essence. However, while Hegel thought that such a process would depend on a law-mediated recognition of others as conditions for the satisfaction of an individual's needs, Marx saw its completion as entirely mediated by labour itself:

Supposing that we had produced in a human manner; each of us would in his production have doubly affirmed himself and his fellow men. I would have: (i) objectified in my production my individuality and its peculiarity and thus both in my activity enjoyed an individual expression of my life and also in looking at the object have had the individual pleasure of realising that my personality was objective, visible to the senses and thus a power raised beyond all doubt. (ii) In your enjoyment or use of my product I would have had the direct enjoyment of realising that I had both satisfied a human need by my work and also objectified the human essence and therefore fashioned for another human being the object that met his need. (iii) I would have been for you the mediator between you and the species and thus been acknowledged and felt by you as a completion of your own essence and a necessary part of yourself and have thus realised that I am confirmed both in your thought and in your love. (iv) In my expression of my life I would have fashioned your experience of your life, and thus in my own activity have realised my own essence, my human, my communal essence.<sup>54</sup>

So with Marx, relations between individuals no longer rely on the laws of the state for their mediation. Instead, the character of such relations is determined by the sphere of “sensuous [and] immediate existence,”<sup>55</sup> namely labour as self-realisation – itself a process that needs an institutional framework other than those found under capitalism.<sup>56</sup> In fact, as the passage above demonstrates, Marx went as far as presenting the activity through which humanity transforms nature as the exact same process whereby both the individual and communal essence of the human species are realised. However, in order to meet the conditions whereby both the immediate producer's “sense-experience becomes human for him,”<sup>57</sup> and the satisfaction of his own needs the very same process as the satisfaction of the needs of the species, specific conditions of production must be met. What Marx understood by “human production” means, on the one hand, that labour must assume the form of “open revelation of human faculties.” It is by developing both cognitive and sensuous faculties through the appropriation of the

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<sup>54</sup> Marx, K. “On James Mill,” in McLellan, D. (2000) *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p 132

<sup>55</sup> Marx, K. “On the Jewish Question,” p 64

<sup>56</sup> In the last two chapters I shall attempt to explore the nature of such institutions.

<sup>57</sup> Marx, K. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p 102

material of nature that the objects produced can confirm an individual's essence as identical to the essence of the species as a whole. Consequently, any attempt to mediate social relations through a political community standing outside the sphere of material production would ultimately fill the individual existence with an abstract communality.<sup>58</sup> What Hegel saw as the most absolute expression of the communal essence was thus understood by Marx as an unreal manifestation of social freedom, the historical formation of a society organised around non-human conditions of production. Communality, therefore, is no mere "idea." It is an integral component of the human essence, a need realised through a form of sensuous practice common to the entire human species, namely labour.

On the other hand, Marx thought that the very possibility of developing the wide range of faculties available to human beings through labour was dependent on the nature of the intentions with which one enters such a process. What truly matters for him is not objectification *per se*, but the purpose one attaches to it. In other words, production can become human, and therefore social, only if the individual producer is conscious that the objects created will not only meet his needs but the needs of other individuals too.<sup>59</sup> However, with the introduction of private property, Marx pointed out, one participates in production with a significantly different purpose in mind:

I have produced for myself and not for you, as you have produced for yourself and not for me. You are as little concerned by the result of my production in itself as I am directly concerned by the result of your production. That is, our production is not a production of men for men as such, that is social production. Thus, as a man none of us is in a position to be able to enjoy the product of another. We are not present to our mutual products as men. Thus, neither can our exchange be the mediating movement which confirms that my product is for you, because it is an objectification of your own essence, your need. For what links our production together is not the human essence. Exchange can only act in motion and activate the attitude that each of us has to his own product and thus to the product of another. Each of us sees in his own product only his own selfish needs objectified, and thus in the product of another he only sees the objectification of another selfish need independent and alien to him.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Such an abstract communality has in fact historically been translated into practice as either liberal democracy or state planning.

<sup>59</sup> Chapter seven shall demonstrate that such a mutual recognition of needs depends on an effective communication between the relevant agents, i.e. on a dialogue.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p 130



The emergence of the wage-system and the corresponding need to sell one's labour-power as a condition for survival meant that labour transformed itself into a mere means for the satisfaction of a strictly individual need, thus effectively losing sight of its social character. What may appear at first glance as a change of mere technical significance does actually play a central role in the determination of relations between the individual and the human species as a whole, and stands in evident contradiction to the possibility for socialised production. Unable to transform nature in a conscious and therefore free manner, and thus prevented from investing the range of faculties required for the labour-mediated confirmation of the human essence, the individual producer is constrained to look outside labour itself, and into the process of exchange for the satisfaction of his needs. Now forced to "exchang[e] his products for the products of other people,"<sup>61</sup> the individual begins to relate to others with the self-interested inclinations characteristic of a being dependent on an external agent for the realisation of his own essence. This is precisely what Hegel regarded as the "system of all-round interdependence" whereby state mediated relations means that "each asserts itself and gains through the others."<sup>62</sup> He saw the emergence of a political community alongside the sphere of civil society as incontestable evidence that self-determination had not fallen prey to the hostile character of crude individualism. Instead, he thought that the state would ensure that "the subsistence [*Subsistenz*] and welfare of the individual [*das Einzelnen*] and his rightful existence [*Dasein*] are interwoven with, and grounded on, the subsistence, welfare, and rights of all, and have actuality and security only in this context."<sup>63</sup> However, since such an interdependence is in actual fact the expression of a condition of existence whereby the individual producer fails to relate to the objects created through labour as "examples of the kind," Marx saw it as an abstract form of communality, or the historically specific form of a society organised around the differentiation between individual needs and those of society as a whole.

In sum, therefore, although Marx drew his inspiration for the conceptualisation of a socially cohesive form of autonomy from Hegel's process objectification, he did not seek its completion outside the sphere of labour. As sensuous beings humans, Marx thought, must be capable of realising their essence through labour. The state, as the institutional basis upon which individuals who, as beings forced to sell their own

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<sup>61</sup> Chitty, A. "The Early Marx on Needs," p 27

<sup>62</sup> Hegel, G.W.F. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p 220

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p 221

labour-power in order to live, systematically favour the satisfaction of their own needs *over* the needs of the species, could only be expected to protect the self-interested particularism of bourgeois immediate existence. Hegel's conception of autonomy, in other words, does not resolve in any concrete manner the tension between the individual and society brought about by the organisation of social life around the principle of private property but, instead, tends to favour the former at the expense of the latter, thus defending a *strictly individual form of freedom masquerading as social freedom*. For this reason Marx insisted that the prospects of closing the gap between particular existence and human essence, and eventually turning the individual act of satisfaction of needs into a process confirming the essence of the species as a whole, depended on the individual's participation in a *free and conscious transformation of nature*, and the corresponding capacity to experience such an activity as a process of *self-realisation*.

### ***Concluding remarks***

By shifting the focus of epistemology from an attempt to find the source of knowledge to the task of investigating the conditions under which its constitution is possible, Kant was the first philosopher to locate autonomy within the mediated unity of humanity and nature. Freedom from tutelage, he thought, could not be conceptualised without addressing the issue of the relation between humanity, its own nature, and external nature. Any attempt to achieve autonomy whilst fulfilling the demands of the common good, should indeed be presupposed by the rational mastery of the chaotic world of sense-experience. In response to Kant's conception of enlightenment can be found Hegel's own, which, by giving objectification a key role in human practice, somewhat succeeds in formulating the conditions that could potentially mitigate the asymmetry between humanity and nature found in the philosophical system of his predecessor. As Marx convincingly pointed out, however, Hegel's own schema fails to meet its own expectations. Indeed, with the role of mediating agent now assumed by the so-called rational laws of the state, Hegel's institutional framework not only constrains individuals to realise their freedom as a mere exercise of the mind, it also falls short of restoring the due role of sense-experience which Marx believed to be of particular significance in the mediated relationship between humanity and nature. As such, he conceptualised a form of autonomous practice understood as the *emancipation of both*

*cognitive and sensuous faculties*. But by presenting human and natural sense-experience as intimately related expressions, whilst admitting that autonomy is predicated upon the transformation of nature as mere object of human practice, is Marx, on the one hand, not contradicting himself and, on the other hand, running the risk of confounding the subjugation of nature with that of humanity, thus leaving his theoretical framework vulnerable to potential vulgarisation and pernicious interpretations?<sup>64</sup> The present thesis shall contend that this has in fact been the case, and that a critique of political economy ought to be supplemented by a critical approach capable of grasping the full implications of the aforementioned dialectical asymmetries. The following chapter shall seek to demonstrate that such a task ought to be undertaken by exploring the development of reason from an emancipatory force into an instrument of domination under modernity.

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<sup>64</sup> An evident example of such interpretations can be found in the tradition of Soviet Marxism. Less evident, but equally misleading, are the interpretations of Adorno and Habermas which, as will be shown below, only concentrate on a single dimension of Marx's approach to the mediation of humanity and nature.

## **Chapter 2**

### Towards the Reconciliation of Humanity and Nature

As a period marking humanity's intention to free itself from the fetters of nature and tradition, the Enlightenment has traditionally been viewed as an age of progress. The proliferation of human and natural sciences brought about by reason meant that humanity was beginning to develop an understanding of both itself and the laws of nature. However, what was originally thought to consist in a liberating process would soon reveal its insufficiencies and inherent flaws, such as those identified by Adorno in the philosophy of one of the Enlightenment's most fervent proponents, Kant.<sup>1</sup> The present chapter shall therefore seek to expose the limitations of the latter's attempt to mediate what had previously been viewed as two distinct sources of representation, i.e. reason and experience, and identify the epistemological conditions required for the formulation of a critical theory oriented towards the implementation of emancipatory practice.

#### ***Problematising the Primacy of the Subject***

According to Kant's moral philosophy, the public person must ensure that the absolute law of reason, otherwise known as duty, governs his/her every action. The search for personal happiness, he thought, lacked the universal, and therefore moral, orientations which ought to accompany all individuals in the process of their enlightenment. To guarantee the development of a form of knowledge capable of yielding autonomy at the most general level, reason not only had to hold the forces of external nature in check, it would be called upon to impose a limitation on the will, thereby ensuring that the autonomy realised does not conflict with the common good.

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<sup>1</sup> Adorno's claim that a classical German idealism like Kant's is the philosophical manifestation of bourgeois society is, according to Robert Pippin, not given explicit justification in the member of the Frankfurt School's works. Due to space limitations, this chapter shall not attempt to address such a debate. It shall indeed accept Adorno's immanent criticism of idealism as the epistemological counterpart of his critique of bourgeois society at face value. However, for an exposition of Pippin's argument, see his chapter on Adorno in *The Persistence of Subjectivity*.

Thus, in the process of freeing oneself from self-incurred tutelage, one “must totally separate his desire for happiness from the concept of duty, in order to preserve the latter’s purity.”<sup>2</sup> Presented in this manner, autonomy appears to be consisting in a *struggle* against both external and internal forces of nature, as a condition of existence caused by the necessity to exert control over those influences capable of impinging one’s capacity to maximise the prospects of a self-sufficient life. Such an understanding of the function performed by reason is precisely what led Adorno to make the following conclusion:

The system the Enlightenment has in mind is the form of knowledge which copes most proficiently with the facts and supports the individuals most effectively in the mastery of nature. Its principles are the principles of self-preservation. Immaturity is the inability to survive.<sup>3</sup>

Employing reason in a struggle against external forces and natural inclinations implies removing the potentially normative orientations associated with the maximisation of self-sufficiency, thus restricting the scope of the knowledge constituted thereby to the instrumental domain of self-preservation.<sup>4</sup> Once it has assumed such a form, Adorno suggested, reason would necessarily “adjust[...] the world for the ends of self-preservation,”<sup>5</sup> thus reaching far beyond a mere *understanding* of nature, and eventually serving as a force aimed at its *domination*:

Reason must approach nature with the view, indeed, of receiving information from it, not, however, in the character of a pupil, who listens to all that his master chooses to tell him, but in that of a judge, who compels the witnesses to reply to those questions which he himself thinks fit to propose.<sup>6</sup>

That reason should assert its authority in its dealings with nature has been made rather explicit here. Rather than limiting its scope of action to a merely *receptive* role,

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<sup>2</sup> Kant, I. “On the Common Saying: ‘This may be True in Theory, but it does not Apply in Practice’”, p 69

<sup>3</sup> Adorno, T.W and Horkheimer, M. (1997) *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, London: Verso, p 83

<sup>4</sup> Under conditions of self-preservation, reason no longer serves the individual in his or her quest of what ought or ought not to be. Issues of “right” and “wrong,” and the *subversive* potential of reason have been replaced by concerns addressing *unquestionable facts, with which the individual must attempt to “cope with most proficiently.”* Such a view, however, is disputed by Robert Pippin, whose chapter on Adorno in *The Persistence of Subjectivity* attempts to demonstrate that the member of the Frankfurt School had not fully grasped the nature of Kant’s practical reason.

<sup>5</sup> Hence his qualification of reason as “instrumental.” Adorno, T.W. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p 83

<sup>6</sup> Kant, I. *Critique of Pure Reason*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, London: Henry G. Bohn, p xxvii

the Kantian conception of autonomy as self-preservation is forced to regard reason's "adjusting" function as a faculty aimed at *legislating* on the material provided by nature. Consequently, it should come as no surprise to find, in Adorno's works, an enlightenment project equated with the domination of nature by humanity, one whereby the laws of nature are substituted for those of reason. The aforementioned criticisms do nevertheless appear somewhat surprising, if not almost contrary to the purpose of Kant's groundbreaking work entitled *The Critique of Pure Reason*, where he made it clear that the constitution of knowledge could not be reduced to a preferential treatment of either subjective or objective forces.<sup>7</sup> One is therefore justified in further investigating the role played by nature in his most famous work. As a critique of pure reason, Kant's first critique was partly aimed at distancing his own epistemology from the crude subjectivism of rationalist thinkers such as Descartes, Leibniz or Spinoza. In this key epistemological work, he also intended to distinguish his stance from the relativism of the empiricists, who, like the rationalists, had been misled by conforming to the traditional attempt of finding out the *sources* of knowledge, rather than identifying the *conditions* under which it is possible. A key task of his so-called "revolutionary" work would therefore consist in re-assessing the relation between subjective and objective forces in the constitution of knowledge, or to put it in Kantian terms, in identifying the role of experience in such a process:

That all our knowledge begins with experience there can be no doubt. For how is it possible that the faculty of cognition should be awakened into exercise otherwise than by means of objects which affect our senses, and partly of themselves produce representations, partly rouse our powers of understanding into activity, to compare, to connect, or to separate these, and so to convert the raw material of our sensuous impressions into a knowledge of objects, which is called experience? In respect of time, therefore, no knowledge of ours is antecedent to experience, but begins with it.<sup>8</sup>

So for Kant, experience plays a key role in the constitution of knowledge, but since, as was pointed out above, his critique of pure reason also aimed to distance his epistemology from the empiricist tradition, one is justified in asking what exactly

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<sup>7</sup> In the preface of this work Kant insisted that his epistemology revolved around a "critical distinction of the two modes of representation (the sensible and the intellectual) and the consequent limitations of the conceptions of the pure understanding, and the principles which follow from them." Kant, I. *Critique of Pure Reason*, p xxxiv

<sup>8</sup> Kant, I. *Critique of Pure Reason*, p 1

allowed him to make such a claim? Indeed, how can one assign such a role to experience without falling into the empiricist reductionism of thinkers such as Hobbes and Locke? Kant certainly believed he could, but did not do so by merely re-assessing the role of experience in knowledge. In fact the idealist philosopher could not accept the empiricist concept of experience at face value, and, as a result, wished to redefine the terms under which one could speak of experience. While he accepted the view that sensations played a role in experience, he believed that their “undifferentiated and indeterminate”<sup>9</sup> character meant that the material received directly from them could not constitute experience by itself. In order to make sense of the realm of sensibility, a faculty that could “compare, connect, separate” sensations and eventually convert them into a material intelligible for the laws of the understanding would be required. An investigation of the conditions under which knowledge is possible, and, by extension, conditions under which experience itself is *constituted*, must therefore proceed, in a first instance, with the separation of the “understanding” and “sensibility” into two distinct epistemic elements, that must be consequently re-united for an *actual account* of experience to be possible. The function of joining up the two elements, Kant thought, would be assigned to reason, which he claimed “furnishes us with the principles of knowledge a priori”<sup>10</sup> required for the constitution of experience. With Kant, therefore, experience no longer refers to a raw form of sensory perception, but is treated, instead, as the product of a *dialectically mediated relation* between subjective and objective forces, a relation that prevents him from falling into the dogmatic realm of rationalism or the relativist trap of empiricist epistemology, and that, at first glance, reveals a relation between humanity and nature far more symmetrical than the one found in his political works.

However, an investigation of Kant’s own understanding of the subject-object relation – as an attempt to uncover the epistemological conditions stifling emancipation – would not be complete unless the respective role of “concepts” and “intuitions” is further explored. While he famously claimed that “thought without content are empty”<sup>11</sup> and “intuitions without concepts are blind,”<sup>12</sup> thus clearly affirming the symmetrically dialectical character of the subject-object relation, his differentiation of the intelligible

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<sup>9</sup> Pippin, R. (1982) *Kant’s Theory of Form: Essays on Critique of Pure Reason*. London: Yale University Press, p 29

<sup>10</sup> Kant, I. *The Critique of Pure Reason*, p 1

<sup>11</sup> Kant, I. in Pippin, R. *Kant’s Theory of Form*, p 25

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p 25

and the sensible worlds into “spontaneity” and “receptivity” respectively seems to suggest that not only were the two epistemic elements intertwined, the role performed and the place held by these two elements were also distinct. In his attempt to identify the conditions under which knowledge is possible, Kant found that the undifferentiated and indeterminate character of the “sensory manifold” significantly restricted its role as a source of representation. Sensations could enter the realm of representation as experience only after being located in space and time<sup>13</sup> as “ideal forms of sensibility,”<sup>14</sup> which Kant called intuitions. As such, one could only claim to know the objects as they appear to the subject. Furthermore, as ideal forms of a “passive contact with objects,”<sup>15</sup> intuitions can only perform a receptive role. Their conversion into the actual content of knowledge therefore begins only once the synthesising power of reason has unified the appearances of objects into an intelligible whole or, as Kant would put it, after being “subsumed” under the universality of concepts:

Before objects are given to me, that is, *a priori*, I must presuppose in myself laws of the understanding which are expressed in conceptions *a priori*. To these conceptions then, all objects of experience must necessarily conform.<sup>16</sup>

A close inspection of the process whereby concepts and intuitions are mediated thus exposes a degree of disparity between their respective contribution to the process of constitution of knowledge, with the latter assigned a somewhat more passive role than the former. The asymmetry consequently produced by such a relation led Adorno to conclude that despite Kant’s concern with the conceptualisation of a dialectical relation between subject and object, reason’s grip over the latter effectively renders the sensory manifold obsolete, thus causing the potentially liberating and expressive framework of a mediated unity between humanity and nature to evolve, and indeed regress, into the very foundation of a system of repression of both internal and external nature.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> According to Kant, objects can be known only as they appear to us in space and time. For this particular reason, one can never claim to know such objects “in themselves.”

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p 55

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p 57

<sup>16</sup> Kant, I. *Critique of Pure Reason*, p xxix

<sup>17</sup> As Adorno put it, the “thesis of the primacy of practical reason” found in Kant’s work and other German idealists’, effectively underpins the “program of the absolute control of nature.” Adorno, T.W. *Negative Dialectics*, p 244



Adorno explained such a development by exposing two correlated tendencies in Kant's works. Firstly, Adorno suggested that the transcendental character Kant attributed to the subject, namely its capacity, through reason, to establish what counts as experience and what does not meant that the idealist philosopher could not conceive experience in any way other than as a mere product of subjective forces. The member of the Frankfurt School believed such a condition to be truly problematic as by endowing the subject with such a *sovereign power*,<sup>18</sup> Kant not only assigned it the primary constitutive role in knowledge, it also entitled it to constitute experience itself, thus diminishing the role played by the sensory manifold in experience itself, and ultimately failing to realise its expressive and liberating potential as a source of reflexive pluralism. By claiming to experience objects only as they *subjectively* appear, and "ground[ing] objectivity in[,] the subject,"<sup>19</sup> thereby *transferring* the object's attributes onto the subject, Kant effectively assigned a constitutive function to a non-entity, while liquidating the givenness of the world of objects. However, as Adorno pointed out, the nature of the subject is such that "no matter how we define [it], some entity cannot be juggled out of it."<sup>20</sup> The social reality both *constituted* and *known* by the transcendental subject must therefore be false:

The subject itself is an object insofar as existence is implied by the idealist doctrine of constitution – there must be a subject so that it can constitute anything at all – insofar as this has been borrowed in turn, from the sphere of facticity. The concept of what "is there" means nothing but what exists, and the subject as existent comes promptly under the heading of "object." As pure apperception, however, the subject claims to be the downright Other of all existents. This, too, is the negative appearance of a slice of truth: that the reification which the sovereign subject has inflicted on everything, including itself, is mere illusion.<sup>21</sup>

Adorno was clearly keen to express his astonishment at the form assumed by the Kantian conception of objectivity, and, crucially, at the relation between the subject and the object arising out of such a conception. Kant is here being criticised<sup>22</sup> for ignoring the key fact that "whilst it is impossible for us even to conceive of a subject which is not

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<sup>18</sup> One may recall, here, Adorno's own phrase "sovereignty of the object" cited in "Subject and Object" from which the phrase above is borrowed.

<sup>19</sup> Adorno, T.W. *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. R. Tiedemann, Cambridge: Polity Press, p 2

<sup>20</sup> Adorno, T.W. "Subject and Object" in Arato, A. and Gebhardt, E. ed. (1982) *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, New York: Continuum, p 502

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p 508

<sup>22</sup> Here, Adorno is actually making a criticism applicable to the idealism of both Kant and Hegel.

an object, we can very easily conceive of an object which is not a subject.”<sup>23</sup> The subject’s conditional existence is precisely what led Adorno to argue that not only are concepts empty without intuitions, they are also unthinkable. Kant’s contention that concepts can indeed be thought prior to experience is, in this case, fallacious, and any facticity extracted from “pure” concepts must, as a result, be illusory. Inherent to Kant’s theory of cognition can thus be found a formulation of the relation between subject and object whereby the alleged *self-facticity* of the former serves to produce an illusory reality. In sum, having been denied the capacity to convert the particularity of their existence into the content of experience, individuals are ultimately prevented from relating to the social totality as a realm of *human* practice. A key explanatory feature of the system of domination Adorno believed to be embodied in Kant’s “philosophy of identity” is therefore found in the *reifying tendency* arising out of the sovereign power of the subject. The asymmetry between the subject and the object could therefore be understood as a set of conditions giving way to a form of individual self-sacrifice.

Unfolding alongside the reification of reality can be observed a second, correlated tendency. In the process of establishing itself as *constituens*,<sup>24</sup> the subject does not only produce an illusory reality, it also calls on reason to “discriminate the world”<sup>25</sup> and subsume it under the rule of conceptual universality. To question and, ultimately, know the world, i.e. internal and external nature, meant, according to Kant, allowing reason to impose its truths upon this world. It involved leaving the task of answering questions, posed by phenomena previously left unexplained by the predominance of myths and other traditional beliefs, to the rational faculty. For Adorno, however, the aforementioned process becomes problematic when the truths in question are equated to “whatever remains once everything sensory, everything ephemeral and hence deceptive has been subtracted,”<sup>26</sup> which is, as partly demonstrated above, precisely the case with Kant. The consequence of such an approach to truths, Adorno warned, is that the knowledge and with it the reality upon which those truths have been imposed, assume a “permanent, eternal and timeless”<sup>27</sup> character. Accordingly, the

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<sup>23</sup> Jarvis, S. (1998) *Adorno: A Critical Introduction*, Cambridge: Polity Press, pp 182-3

<sup>24</sup> Terminology used by Adorno to emphasise centrality of subjectivity in the constitution of experience in Kant’s works, and to be distinguished from the *constitutum*, a term used to denote the passivity of the Kantian object.

<sup>25</sup> Pippin, R. *Kant’s Theory of Form*, p 92

<sup>26</sup> Adorno, T.W. *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, p 25. Adorno named such a take on the conception of truth a “residual theory of truth.”

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, pp 25-6. Adorno followed his observation by noting that “this strange idea of the truth as something lasting and enduring somehow always appears where urban exchange societies have

radically different and new would emerge as undesirable occurrences, as “a source of insecurity, a threat, something worrying,”<sup>28</sup> i.e. as false. Reason would no longer be capable of questioning the established order. It would *be* the established order itself. By turning into the very thing it was originally employed to subvert, reason thus would lose its reflexive, and therefore liberating, character.<sup>29</sup> Already with Kant’s rational mediation of humanity and nature as a relation paving the way for the development of the truths of reason into both immutable and unquestionable facts standing higher and above empirical individuals, can one find the germs of historical circumstances under which individuals are not only prevented from relating to the wider social reality *as their own* (reification), but also from *challenging* it (absolutisation). The sovereign power of the subject, whose origins Adorno traced back to the limitations reason imposes on the will and to the concepts’ involvement in the “sensory uptake of the world,”<sup>30</sup> laid the foundations for a system whereby individuals not only confronted the wider social reality as a given and insuperable other, but also failed to realise the full range of their capacities as cognitive *and* sensuous beings.<sup>31</sup> In Kant’s works, Adorno concluded, are found the elements of a *repressive* form of knowledge and social reality *in nucleo*.

While Adorno’s criticisms against Kant convincingly exposed the problematic nature of conditions of existence arising out of the subsumption of particularity under universality – finding their political expression in the repressive laws of the modern state and its bureaucratic apparatus – one is then justified in asking what place, exactly,

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developed.” For him, therefore, one could find in Kant’s works the epistemological equivalent to the bourgeois institutions flourishing under modernity.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p 26

<sup>29</sup> Within Kant’s epistemology, then, lie the embryonic conditions upon which would rest the culture industry of advanced capitalist societies, namely the truths of reason turning into myth. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, however, Adorno establishes a slight contrast between the degree of autonomy (or lack thereof) embodied in Kant’s own epistemology and the heteronomy produced by the culture industry: “The man with leisure has to accept what the culture manufacturers offer him. Kant’s formalism still expected a contribution from the individual, who was thought to relate the varied experiences of the senses to fundamental concepts; but industry robs the individual of this function. Its prime service to the customer is to do the schematizing for him. Kant said that there was a secret mechanism in the soul which prepared directly intuitions in such a way that they could be fitted into the system of pure reason. But today that secret has been deciphered. While the mechanism is to all appearances planned by those who serve up the data of experience, that is, by the culture industry, it is in fact forced upon the latter by the power of society, which remains irrational, however we may try to rationalize it; and this inescapable force is processed by commercial agencies so that they give an artificial impression of being in command. There is nothing left for the consumer to command. Producers have done it for him.” Adorno, T.W. and Horkheimer, M. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p 125

<sup>30</sup> Pippin, R. “Concept and Intuition. On Distinguishability and Separability,” *Hegel-Studien*, Vol. 40, 2005, p 34

<sup>31</sup> A similarity with Marx can be observed here. Indeed, both thinkers understood autonomy as the emancipation of both mental and physical capacities.

should concepts hold in the constitution of an *emancipatory* form of knowledge? What form, in other words, should the relation between subject and object assume in order to preclude humanity's domination over its own and external nature, and create, thereby, conditions favourable for the emancipation of both mental and physical capacities? The following section shall begin to answer such questions.

### ***From Identity to the Non-identical***

While most of Adorno's criticism against Kant was founded upon the latter's apparently problematic distinction between the spontaneity of concepts and the receptivity of intuitions, and the asymmetrical relation resulting therefrom, Robert Pippin questioned Kant's success in maintaining such a distinction, thus opening up the way for a re-assessment of the subject-object relation suggested by the idealist philosopher. In his article entitled "Concepts and Intuitions: On Distinguishability and Separability" Pippin, pointed out a tension in Kant's work. Like Adorno, he believed that Kant's own dialectical approach failed to fulfil its promises – such as the move away from subjectivism – a failure which he too identified as being caused by a tension between concepts and intuitions. However, while for Adorno, the identity of subject and object is symptomatic of Kant's formal separation between concepts and intuitions and the respective distinction between spontaneity and receptivity, for Pippin the fact that intuitions are "unusual species of conceptual representations"<sup>32</sup> effectively serves to blur the latter differentiations. The Kant of the "second-edition Transcendental Deduction,"<sup>33</sup> he argued, does not appear to suggest that concepts impose themselves upon the world of objects from the outside, having to bring, and ultimately *subsume*, intuitions under their rule, but are instead already *present* in the sensory uptake of this same world:

[T]hought is not merely presented with and then applied to and restricted by, a thoroughly non-conceptual sensory manifold. The manifold is already conceptually articulated; concepts are

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p 37

<sup>33</sup> Pippin is here referring to the section entitled "Transcendental Deduction" in Kant's second edition of the Critique of Pure Reason.

engaged in our “sensory uptake” of the world, and the separation claim *and* the strategy it grounds *and* the mind-world picture it assumes must now all be qualified, even re-thought.<sup>34</sup>

What Pippin is suggesting, here, is the fact that Kant does not consistently defend the view whereby the subject and the object are united “mechanically,” with conceptual universality having to impose itself upon, and subsume, the realm of sensibility. Instead, a case is being made for a Hegelian reading of Kant’s dialectics, namely the treatment of the relation as an “organic unity” between the subject and its “negated other” (the object), which Pippin grounds in the conceptual qualities of the sensory manifold. Could the recognition of the object as a “negated other,” then, offer a foundation upon which knowledge can be stripped of its subsumptive and repressive character? In order to answer this question, we shall now turn to Adorno’s treatment of Hegel’s dialectics.

A key problem Adorno discovered in his investigation of Kant’s own identity thinking revolved around the absolutising and reifying tendencies arising out reason’s role as mediating agent.<sup>35</sup> By imposing its truths upon the objects, reason not only achieves the classification of the content (subject) under the form (predicate) of any knowledge claim, but also, and more crucially, their identity.<sup>36</sup> The permanent character attributed to those truths, and the strict concern with the immediate relation between the subject and the predicate eventually serve to congeal such a relation, thereby eradicating the contradictions making up the reality claimed to be known here, and ultimately failing to account for the fact that the truth of “what is” actually depends on “what is not.” As Hegel put it:

The untruth of the immediate judgement lies in the incongruity between its form and its content. To say “This rose is red” involves (in virtue of the copula “is”) the coincidence of subject and predicate. The rose however is a concrete thing, and so not red only: it also has an odour, a specific form, and many other features not implied in the predicate red. There are other flowers and objects which are red too. The subject and predicate in the immediate judgement touch, as it were, only in a single point, but do not cover each other.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Pippin, R. “Concept and Intuition: On Distinguishability and Separability,” p 34

<sup>35</sup> See section one

<sup>36</sup> Jarvis, S. *Adorno: A Critical Introduction*, p 165

<sup>37</sup> Hegel, G.W. quoted in Jarvis, S. *Adorno: A Critical Introduction*, p 165

Hegel's dialectics, Adorno thought, provided a framework within which "the protest against any philosophy of identity"<sup>38</sup> could be articulated. By "reliquifying" the subject-predicate relation, Hegel did indeed succeed in revealing the contradictions making up the reality and was, as a result, capable of exposing the *dependence* of "what is" on "what is not," or, as Adorno put it, "[i]dentity's dependence on the nonidentical."<sup>39</sup> By turning the object into a negated "other," i.e. a definite entity now capable of retaining its character as particular, Hegel also turns the subject-predicate identity into a mere *moment* in the historical formation of knowledge. Now released from the shackles of eternal identity, the non-identical object can begin to endorse a *multiplicity* of forms, thus opening up the way for critical thinking. The treatment of the object as the non-identical, then, serves to free it from the dictates of conceptual universality and, accordingly, preclude the repressive asymmetry arising out of the subsumptive function of reason. Hegel, therefore, furnishes the philosophical tools for a critique of both identity-thinking and the repressive reality corresponding to it.

What allowed Hegel to reliquify the form-content relation was the fact that, contrary to Kant, he saw reason as a historicised form of consciousness called Spirit (*Geist*). In Hegel's works, then, the subject enters a formative process taking place through "movement, contradiction and negation"<sup>40</sup> to attain its most accomplished form in the objectivity of rational social and political institutions. Reason, here, unlike Kant's, does not consist of a cognitive faculty employed with the aim of controlling the forces of both internal and external nature. Instead, as objective spirit, it effectively mediates the subject. However, by famously declaring that "the real is rational" and the "rational is real," or affirming that "the whole is true," Hegel significantly narrowed the gap between his own philosophy and Kant's identity-thinking.

In its formative process, the subject does not merely recognise the object *as* an other. The dialectical trajectory pursued by the subject does indeed involve yet another negation, which this time consists in the subject's recognition of itself *in* that other, or, as Hegel put it, a "negation of the negation." In the Hegelian system of thought, the subject recognises the socio-political institutions as the objective form of itself, thus ultimately relating to the object as its very own other. Objectivity, therefore, mediates

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<sup>38</sup> Adorno, T.W. *Negative Dialectics*, p 120

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p 120

<sup>40</sup> Schecter, D. (2005) *Beyond Hegemony: Towards a New Philosophy of Political Legitimacy*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p 132. In the final chapter, I shall attempt to show why and how such a process could be given both intellectual and material expression by a re-organisation of economic and political life into consumer councils and producer guilds.

subjectivity only insofar as the former is the rational and self-conscious manifestation of the latter:

the laws give expression to that which each individual is and does; the individual knows them not merely to be what constitutes his universal nature as a “thing,” but knows himself, too, in that form, or knows it to be particularised in his own individuality and in each of his fellow-citizens.<sup>41</sup>

So for Hegel the universal does not perform a subsumptive role akin to Kant’s mechanical unity,<sup>42</sup> but, instead, serves as a medium for the *differentiation* of the particular. With reason now embodied in the laws of the state (the object), universality no longer imposes itself upon the particular, but instead serves as a medium for the subject to gain consciousness of itself as *particularised universal*. In order to do so, however, it must first recognise itself in those laws. In this sense, knowledge of the “thing” begins with the discovery of the contradictions and particularities making up the reality (negation), and ends with the subject overcoming those contradictions through the recognition of the negated other as the subject’s externalised self (“negation of the negation”). For Hegel, then, knowledge is presupposed by a movement steered by the subject itself, namely the movement in thought through which the subject identifies itself with the object, and gives the latter and itself their place within the epistemological totality. In this totality, each element is said to have found its identical other. The subject/form/universal/individual has identified itself with its respective predicate/content/particular/institution. This subject-led process of knowledge formation through differentiation, which Hegel understood as totalising and absolute, therefore, exhibits similar features to Kant’s identity-thinking. As Adorno pointed out, “[e]ven to Hegel, after all, subjectivity is the universal and the total identity,”<sup>43</sup> in which the particularity of existence begins to gain epistemological significance only “in its conveyance to the knowing subject that rediscovers itself” in the reality.<sup>44</sup> At first glance, then, and in virtue of the fact that the negation of the object as an other not only opens up an horizon for a constitution of knowledge steered by the contradictions

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<sup>41</sup> Hegel, G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Mind*, pp 377-8

<sup>42</sup> Worth reminding here is the fact that, as Pippin argued, Kant’s understanding of the subject-object unity assumes this mechanical form in most of the passages of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, whereas the organic unity appears confined to the second edition ‘Transcendental Deduction.’ See Pippin, R. “Concept and Intuition. On Distinguishability and Separability”

<sup>43</sup> Adorno, T.W. *Negative Dialectics*, p 350

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p 10

making up the social reality, but also recognises the dependence of knowledge upon the non-identical (thus offering a framework within which the integrity of the object is maintained), Hegel's conception of the relationship between subject and object does appear to contain the foundations for the development of a non-repressive form of knowledge. However, by proclaiming the possibility of absolute knowledge, following the subject's recognition of the object as its externalised self, Hegel eventually gives primacy to the subject, whose task eventually appears to consist in a resolution of the aforementioned contradictions, and the subsequent classification of the sensuous particulars under a totalising conceptual apparatus. Critical theory, Adorno argued, should therefore attempt to realise the epistemological potential already embodied in Hegel's thought, whilst aiming to "transcend the concept."<sup>45</sup>

One is nevertheless justified in asking, at this point, what epistemological alternative to the aforementioned conceptual apparatus Adorno is effectively defending, and which set of political forms can be intuited from such an approach. In order to answer the question, one must refer to the hitherto undisclosed first half of the quote regarding his treatment of the concept. There, Adorno recognises the fact that "[p]hilosophy [...] must strive, *by way of the concept*, to transcend the concept" [Italics added].<sup>46</sup> In another chapter of *Negative Dialectics*, he even admits the following:

The purely particular activity and business of the individual refer to needs which he has as a part of nature, i.e. as a mere existent particular. That even these, its commonest functions, do not come to nothing, but have reality, is brought about by the universal sustaining medium.<sup>47</sup>

Rather than an outright rejection of the concept, then, Adorno's task involves a re-assessment of its role in knowledge. Above all, in its exercise as a "universal sustaining medium" giving "reality" to the particularity of existence, the concept must be prevented from realising its absolutising tendencies. While in Kant's works, the concept's role as medium manifests itself as a subsumptive force, in Hegel such a role is overshadowed by the concept's position as *telos* of knowledge. Thus, while its epistemological necessity is recognised, the conceptual apparatus cannot be expected to serve as the dominant or final epistemic moment in the constitution of knowledge. Instead, Adorno suggested, one should expect it to *assist* the sensuous particulars in

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p 15

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p 15

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, pp 376-7



their conversion into constitutive components of knowledge, whilst preserving their non-identical character. Within such a process, universality no longer designates, anticipates or absorbs the particular. Instead, it merely unfolds in a *symmetrical partnership* with the relevant particular. Nor does the concept eternalise its bond with sensuous experience. The universal now enters into a *situated and non-identical relation* with the particular, which no longer restricts the objects to a single possible configuration with concepts. Movement and contradiction can henceforth be preserved. Adorno's concern with the preservation of reflexive diversity, i.e. non-identity, in his epistemological project can therefore be said to point towards a pluralist form of politics.

Whether Adorno is dealing with Kant or Hegel, his diagnosis is clear: idealist epistemology not only elevates the subject above the object, it is also underpinned by a positivist frame of reference (identity-thinking) precluding the pluralisation of thoughts, and ultimately closing up possibilities for change. In response to such repressive forms of epistemology – linked to oppressive social forms – Adorno undertook a re-assessment of the relation between the subject and the object whose form, he believed, ought to be defined in terms of *affinity*<sup>48</sup> rather than *unity*. Both anti-conceptual and anti-nominalist,<sup>49</sup> Adorno's epistemological stance attempts to locate the subject-object relation halfway between the objectivism of materialist thought and the subjectivism of idealist philosophies such as Kant's and Hegel's. In sum, therefore, the epistemological project defended by the critical theory of Adorno aims to reconcile humanity and nature through their *mediated non-identity*. The following section shall explore the implications of such a relation for the nature of the mediating agent.

### ***From Instrumental to Aesthetic Rationality***

In his attempt to conceptualise the foundations of a form of knowledge underpinned by a mediated non-identity of subject and object, Adorno also exposed what he believed to be a rationality of a non-instrumental form. As he consistently, and rather convincingly, demonstrated in both *Negative Dialectics* and *Dialectic of the*

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<sup>48</sup> Jarvis, S. *Adorno: A Critical Introduction*, p 177

<sup>49</sup> See Pippin, R. (2005) *The Persistence of Subjectivity: On the Kantian Aftermath*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p 106

*Enlightenment*, identity-thinking is characterised by a concept of reason which has lost its capacity to realise the critical and expressive nature of individuals, and merely subjects them to the imperatives of universality. Whether subsumptive or totalising, the bureaucratisation of the social reality engendered by identity-thinking eventually turns both reason into an instrument geared towards the domination of both external and internal nature, and individuals into passive consumers of culture. Reason, in this sense, no longer serves individuals in their quest for autonomy. Its motives are those of self-preservation. Adorno, as a result, sought to cultivate reason's critical orientations, namely its capacity to preserve the non-identity of subject and object.

At first glance, Adorno's call for a reflexive form of rationality presents little differences with Kant's "practical reason." Both thinkers do indeed place a strong emphasis on the role played by reason in autonomous reflection. Adorno, however, takes issue with Kant regarding the nature of the mediation involved in such a process. Indeed, as was shown above,<sup>50</sup> Kant understands autonomy in terms of "freedom *from* self-incurred tutelage [Emphasis added]," i.e. negatively, where reason is primarily employed to both preserve the self against the so-called chaotic world of objects by ordering it and exerting control over natural forces, rather than as a medium for the actual realisation of the self. This view of the mediating role of reason as a "causal necessity,"<sup>51</sup> and of its nature as instrumental, has been presented by Adorno as deeply problematic:

[R]eason constitutes the court of judgment of calculation, which adjusts the world for the ends of self-preservation and recognizes no function other than the preparation of the object from the mere sensory material in order to make it the material of subjugation.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> See section one of the present chapter

<sup>51</sup> Pippin, R. *The Persistence of Subjectivity*, p 114. In this work, Pippin also attempts to separate Adorno's claims from the actual content of Kant's thought. He concluded that, contrary to Adorno's interpretation of Kant, the latter understands the employment of reason as a derivative of a practical – not causal – necessity. In other words, individuals acting rationally do so on the basis of strictly normative compulsions, rather than as an attempt to free themselves from their conditions as "natural animals." I do contend, however, that Pippin tends to abstract Kant's claims from the historical conditions under which they were made. In order to understand fully the Kantian dynamics of reason, his philosophical claims should be read within the context of the Enlightenment, namely as a part of a current of thought advocating humanity's freedom *from* the fetters of nature and tradition. In this sense, reason becomes an instrument at the disposal of humanity in its quest for freedom from physical and traditional constraints through the control of natural forces and rational questioning of the established socio-political order.

<sup>52</sup> Adorno, T.W. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp 83-4

By presenting reason as a transcendental faculty effectively legislating with strength over natural forces and causing the conceptual apparatus to determine the senses,<sup>53</sup> Kant developed a form of reflexivity founded upon reactive self-subjugation and the superiority of universality. He therefore explained the manifestation of the critical orientations of reason as a subsumptive process leading to the *repressive and permanent resolution of the contradictory character of the reality*.

It was not until Hegel that the dependence of “what is” on “what is not” in the process of reflection was recognised. Here reason only emerges as the result of a historical process of formation attributing a constitutive function to the object. No longer understood as a regulative faculty always at the disposal of humanity, reflexivity opens itself up to the spontaneity of natural inclinations. Such an opening, however, only emerges as an incomplete moment – as a negation to be superseded by an additional one. The fact that the object can expect to mediate the subject only following the latter's recognition of the former as its externalised self presupposes that in its final developmental stage, i.e. as reason, reflexivity loses, once again, its critical function. As a self-conscious subject, the individual merely recognises the whole as true, the real as rational, and is thus left with a *contemplative form of reflexivity in which reason accommodates the differentiated needs of each individual to the totalised, i.e. non-contradictory, reality*. Thus, identity-thinking could be said to find its most complete political expression in the modern bureaucratic state.

Adorno, who praised Hegel for presenting reason as a moment, wishes to preserve the “negative” or “non-identical” stage of reflection in such a way as to give the spontaneity of human existence its due in reflexivity. The conceptual tools employed by Adorno against Hegel, then, point towards a political form that is not only pluralist, but that also corresponds to an institutional framework sufficiently flexible to allow individuals to make decisions *voluntarily* and *continually* on the basis of both their cognitive and sensuous faculties, i.e. libertarianism. For reason, he believed, can retain its critical character only by giving sensuous experience the means to direct the process of reflection. It unfolds in what Adorno called the “aesthetic feeling”:

Aesthetic feeling is not what is being aroused in us. It is more like a sense of wonderment in the presence of what we behold; a sense of being overwhelmed in the presence of a phenomenon that is nonconceptual while at the same time being determinate. The arousal

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p 84

of subjective effect by art is the last thing we should want to dignify with the name of aesthetic feeling. True aesthetic feeling is oriented to the object; it is the feeling of the object, not some reflex in the viewer.<sup>54</sup>

In virtue of his/her capacity to experience the aesthetic feeling, the artist is in a position to grasp the moment of affinity between concepts and sensuous particulars, and preserve their non-identity, through what Adorno called “mimesis.” Reason is thereby reconciled with the natural inclinations of the will. Adorno, however, did not claim to be exposing the dynamics of a new form of rationality. As Jarvis pointed out:

*Negative Dialectics* [...] does not recommend an ‘aestheticized reason’, but is giving an account of what reason is like. Reason cannot avoid being aesthetic, in the minimal sense that its concepts are all entangled with experience, rather than being rigid atoms of designation. Mimesis itself is a kind of rationality for Adorno [...]<sup>55</sup>

Adorno's mimetic mediation of the subject and the object *cultivates* the aesthetic moment of reflection, and turns it into the very fabric of emancipatory criticism. Through mimesis, then, rationality preserves the moment of the non-identical as a situated and symmetrical partnership between a concept and a particular, and eventually serves as an outlet for the channelling of the plurality of sensuous experience into social criticism, the outcome of which assumes the form of what Adorno called “constellation thinking.”

Presented as the non-repressive alternative and as a response to the absolutising, reifying and homogenising tendencies of identity-thinking, Adorno's constellations aim to accommodate the pluralistic character of sensuous experience with the rational character of human cognition. By allowing the object to gain a constitutive function *sui generis*, constellations can form a framework loose enough to yield expressive potential to the spontaneity of natural inclinations. As such, constellations are thought processes that capture the movement of the objective reality and, for this reason, consist of a form of knowledge capable of accommodating the rapidly changing character of aesthetic impulses. Adorno therefore concluded that in advanced capitalist societies, the only individuals capable of mimetically mediating the subject and the object are the artists. In a work of art, then, the artist can channel his/her sensuous energies into the negation of

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<sup>54</sup> Adorno, T.W. (1984) *Aesthetic Theory*, London: Routledge, p 236

<sup>55</sup> Jarvis, S. *Adorno: A Critical Introduction*, p 178

the existing reality, which embodies a singular and alternative affinity between a particular and its universal. Without a “unifying moment,” however, sensuous particulars would find no affinity with the cognitive faculties, and be precluded a conversion into the material of critique. Thus, even in non-identity thinking “the unifying moment survives,” but rather than causing concepts to “progress step by step to a more universal cover-concept,” it brings them “into a constellation,” where “what is specific in the object” is brought to the fore.<sup>56</sup> Achieved through mimesis, this unifying moment does not involve the subject seeking to master the object (Kant), or the absorption of the latter into the former (Hegel) but can, instead, expect to constitute a basis for constellation thinking “only on the condition that the subject could accept what is other to it as other.”<sup>57</sup> Adorno’s own approach to the non-repressive relation between subject and object thus refers to a particular attitude to world, namely the critique of the autonomous artist’s mimetically mediated negation of the social reality.

Through mimesis, the artist can explore a “new” affinity between subject and object, and through negation it is also able to represent the contradictions making up the social reality. For this reason, works of art embody both a critical and utopian character:

One of the crucial antinomies of art today is that it wants to be and must be squarely Utopian, as social reality increasingly impedes Utopia, while at the same time it should not be Utopian so as not to be found guilty of administering comfort and illusion.<sup>58</sup>

The mimesis-negation matrix of Adorno’s critical theory is therefore geared towards the exposition of a tension between an existing and a possible reality, whilst remaining within the realm of immanence. A degree of utopianism, then, is accepted only to the extent that it can serve individuals to accept “what is other to it as other,” and not drive them into the false and complacent security of a world-to-be. Through the critique of autonomous<sup>59</sup> works of art, then, the critical theorist discovers “pure and uncompromised” contradictions which both reveal “that it is not ideology itself which is untrue but rather its pretension to correspond to reality,” and open up possibilities for

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<sup>56</sup> Adorno cited in Jarvis, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction*, p 176-7

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p 188

<sup>58</sup> Adorno, T.W. *Aesthetic Theory*, p 47

<sup>59</sup> A Work of art is autonomous or “successful” not because it “resolves objective contradictions in a spurious harmony” but because it “expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure.” Adorno, T.W. “Cultural Criticism and Society,” in Adorno, T.W. (1967) *Prisms*, London: Neville Spearman, p 32

thinking in terms of alternatives.<sup>60</sup> According to Adorno, the failures of the Marxian critique of political economy lay precisely in its inability to combine the critical and utopian elements in such a manner. Instead of attempting to reveal the tension between the “pretension” of ideology and the objective reality, it sought to falsify ideology itself and was, in turn, forced to remain within the exclusive confines of a form of critique adopting a standpoint outside culture and, consequently, overlook the liberating potential of the superstructural elements. Thus, instead of succeeding in revealing existing contradictions and preserving the autonomy of culture, Marx’s critique effectively aimed to resolve the former, and end the latter, thereby failing to appreciate the problems associated with the move from negation to affirmation through the positive unity of subject and object, and ignoring the radical potential of the “reflection of the mind on its own failures.”<sup>61</sup> After all:

Cultural criticism is [...] only able to reproach culture so penetratingly for prostituting itself, for violating in its decline the pure autonomy of the mind, because culture originates in the radical separation of mental and physical work. It is from this separation, the original sin as it were, that culture draws its strength.<sup>62</sup>

By vacillating between an immanent (revealing contradictions) and transcendent (utopian) critique of culture, Adorno does not only claim to be safeguarding critical theory against contemplation and illusion respectively,<sup>63</sup> but also against the vain and potentially pernicious attempt of seeking to uncover the seeds of emancipation through the critique of political economy alone, thus setting up the broad issues included in the Cole-Habermas debate discussed in the ultimate chapters of this thesis. As the very source of the aforementioned “original sin,” and in contrast to the work of art, labour cannot serve as a medium for the reconciliation of humanity and nature. Advanced capitalist societies do indeed deny the majority of workers the possibility of employing their mental faculties in labour. As a primarily “physical” – and therefore one-dimensional – sphere of activity geared towards the mastery of nature by humanity under the capitalist division of labour, labour remains a sphere exclusively confined to the rule of instrumental reason and, as a result, cannot constitute the target of a critique

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<sup>60</sup> Adorno, T.W. “Cultural Criticism and Society,” p 32

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p 32

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p 26

<sup>63</sup> See “Cultural Criticism and Society,” pp 31-34

aiming to reveal contradictions making up the reality. Why then, should yet another one-dimensional sphere like culture constitute a more appropriate object of critique?

He defended his own critique of culture for two main reasons. A first reason, partly revealed in the passage above, regards his own critique of Marx's base-superstructure schema. On the one hand, he believed that "[b]y transferring the notion of causality directly from the realm of physical nature to society, it [transcendent critique] falls back behind its own object. [text added],"<sup>64</sup> as it eventually turns the very conditions it sought to problematise into immutable natural laws. On the other hand, the somewhat unilateral logic of causality employed by Marx led him to ignore the possibility of, and necessity for, autonomous works of art and the liberating potential of culture itself. The second and co-related reason regards the relationship between theory and practice. While Marx and Marxists are keen to emphasise the role of practice, Adorno contends that

[t]he trouble with this view is that it results in the prohibition of thinking. Very little is needed to turn the resistance against repression repressively against those who – little as they might wish to glorify their state of being – do not desert the standpoint that they have come to occupy. The often evoked unity of theory and praxis has a tendency to give way to the predominance of praxis.<sup>65</sup>

Adorno's emphasis on cultural critique, then, aims to both preserve criticism as the central instrument of resistance and protect critical theory and society from the repressive potential of revolutionary action.<sup>66</sup> However, although he does describe his own critique of culture as vacillating between immanence and transcendence, his caution, combined with the firm belief that "[a]t the present moment, no higher form of society is concretely visible"<sup>67</sup> forced him to favour the former over the latter, and to fall into the contemplative realm of *aporetic resistance*. Indeed, not only has his critical theory been deprived of its utopian element,<sup>68</sup> it has also never attempted to include a

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p 34

<sup>65</sup> Adorno, T.W. "Resignation," p 199

<sup>66</sup> Such a view is echoed in Adorno's ambivalence towards the 1968 protests. Indeed, although he was sympathetic to the cause, he condemned the violent character assumed by the protests.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p 202

<sup>68</sup> In "Resignation" Adorno clearly rejected any direct attempt to include a utopian element in critique: "The Utopian impulse in thinking is all the stronger, the less it objectifies itself in Utopia – a further form of regression – whereby it sabotages its own realization." Adorno had already warned us of the dangers of utopian thinking. However, here, he does not merely refer to the problems associated with *high degrees of utopianism*, but to those *utopianism per se* may indeed cause. Adorno, T.W. "Resignation," p 202

transformative one. The task at hand, then, is to combine both the critical and utopian moments as Adorno presented them in “Cultural Criticism and Society,” but without the pessimistic rejection of the latter moments. In other words, critical theory should somehow aim to revive the transcendent character of critique. While Adorno believed that such a task would necessarily lead to repressive forms of praxis, he failed to identify the “implicit thesis” of the symmetrical relationship between humanity and nature in Marx’s works, and was therefore significantly less inclined to consider labour as a sphere of self-realisation, or the critique of political economy as a fruitful instrument of resistance against the rule of instrumental reason. A close inspection of Marx’s approach to labour does nevertheless reveal the multi-dimensional character of this key transformative activity, which is indeed presented as one capable of giving expression to aesthetic rationality.<sup>69</sup> Marx’s critique of labour, then, remains transcendent, to the extent that it requires the critic to contrast “what is” and what “ought to be” corresponding to the opposition of alienated and free labour respectively, and tending towards the resolution of this contradiction in favour of the latter. However, it is also immanent to the extent that it reveals the contradictions between “what is” and “what is not,” as the tension between the promises of bourgeois ideology and the reality of material conditions, all of which without necessitating a standpoint outside the immediate reality. Marx’s critique of political economy can, in sum, serve as a framework within which any individual taking part in *production* can aporetically resist the repressive rule of instrumental rationality within such a sphere. On the other hand, as a *transformative critique*, Marx’s approach to labour effectively aims beyond the merely contemplative task of resistance, thereby raising the stakes and expectations of critical theory. However, having reached a stage of capitalism under which the rule of instrumental reason has become so total, the consideration of critical instruments capable of both resisting *and* overcoming the reifying, absolutising and homogenising tendencies of the culture industry, and part of which are contained in Adorno’s own critique of knowledge, is more pressing than ever.

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<sup>69</sup> See the third section of chapter one for a more detailed account of Marx’s approach to the relationship between sensuous and cognitive faculties in labour.



### *Concluding Remarks*

Drawing its inspiration from Adorno's own views on Kant's epistemology, the critique of knowledge formulated here sought to expose the limitations and problems emanating from the Enlightenment thinker's attempt to mediate humanity and nature through reason. It has been shown that by assigning a more active role to concepts in knowledge, his epistemology effectively paved the way for *humanity's domination of nature* and the development of repressive socio-political institutions, which Hegel himself failed to overcome. An alternative epistemological project aimed at *reconciling* humanity and nature and inspired, once again, by Adorno is here being defended. It was nevertheless argued that in order to take critical theory beyond the narrow and merely contemplative realm of aporetic resistance, the non-identity of subject and object corresponding to the aforementioned reconciliation ought to be mediated by a transformative activity conceptualised by Marx in his early works, namely *labour as self-realisation*. The task of the remaining chapters shall therefore consist in identifying the conditions under which the transformative critique of labour can succeed in capturing the principle of negativity embodied in Adorno's critique of knowledge, whilst maintaining the utopian elements of Marx's critique of political economy.

## **Chapter 3**

### Realising the Transformative Potential of Critical Theory

The task of the previous two chapters mainly consisted in revealing labour's central role in a form of critical theory seeking to free humanity and nature from the repressive rule of instrumental reason and the socio-political institutions ensuing therefrom. As such, it was argued that the realisation of the transformative potential of critical theory depended on its anticipation of alternative subject-object relations mediated by labour as self-realisation. Whilst such an insight into alternative objective conditions of existence may, at first glance, deviate from the task set out by the earlier generation of the Frankfurt School, the present chapter shall seek to demonstrate the manner in which aesthetic negation can be reconciled with an active utopian content in critical theory. For this reason, I shall mainly concentrate on the work of Marcuse which, despite several limitations, provided some of the theoretical tools necessary for a critical theory aiming to reach beyond the narrow scope of aporetic resistance

#### ***Uniting Theory and Practice***

In line with one of Adorno's central goals, Marcuse wished to elaborate a "mode of thought capable of [both] piercing the ideology"<sup>1</sup> and resisting the technological domination produced by a society founded upon an asymmetry between humanity and (both internal and external) nature. In order to achieve such a goal, Marcuse, like Adorno before him, founded part of his critical theory upon Hegel's "determinate negation." However, several of his works<sup>2</sup> indicate that, in contrast with Adorno, he believed in the possibility of supplanting the existing socio-political institutions with

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<sup>1</sup> Marcuse, H. "A Note on Dialectic" in Arato, A. and Gebhardt, E. (eds.) (1987) *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*. New York: Continuum, p 451

<sup>2</sup> Marcuse's optimism regarding the prospects of supplanting the so-called repressive institutions of advanced capitalism with liberating ones is particularly evident in *Eros and Civilization* and *An Essay on Liberation*.

new, non-repressive ones. As a result, Marcuse could not accept the limitations imposed upon critical theory by Adorno,<sup>3</sup> and therefore attempted to identify the ways in which the critical content of theory could inform a form of practice oriented towards radical change.

Marcuse began his attempt to unite theory and practice by undertaking a return to the works of Hegel. Although he clearly praised Hegel for the same reasons as Adorno had before him, that is for uncovering the reliance of “what is” on “what is not,” and coming up with a “tool for analysing the world of facts in terms of its internal inadequacy,”<sup>4</sup> Marcuse did so with the aim of “comprehending the reality whole.”<sup>5</sup> As he put it:

[Hegel’s negative philosophy] starts with the concepts that grasp reality as a multitude of objective things, simply “being,” free from any subjectivity. They are qualitatively and quantitatively connected with each other, and the analysis of these connections hits upon relations that can no longer be interpreted in terms of objective qualities and quantities but requires principles and forms of thought that negate the traditional concepts of being and reveal the subject to be the very substance of reality.<sup>6</sup>

As the passage seems to suggest, while the first-phase negation remains a key moment in revealing the contradictions making up social reality, it can only perform a limited role in the wider and more ambitious project of social transformation. According to Marcuse, the prospects for the realisation of the latter project effectively depend on individuals’ capacity to grasp social reality as the product of human action, or as a “multitude of objective things” that are *not* “free from any subjectivity,” thereby piercing the veil of reification. By revealing the subject as the “very substance of [the total] reality,” the *second-phase negation* thus offers a basis for “mastering reality through self-conscious practice.”<sup>7</sup> Armed with this mode of thought, individuals are said

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted here that even in his most pessimistic work, *One-dimensional Man*, Marcuse continues to present revolutionary action as a possibility: “*One-dimensional Man* will vacillate throughout between two contradictory hypotheses: (1) that advanced industrial society is capable of containing qualitative change for the foreseeable future; (2) that forces and tendencies exist which may break this containment and explode the society.” Marcuse, H. (1964) *One-Dimensional Man*, London: Routledge and Keagan Paul Ltd., p xv

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p 445

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p 451

<sup>6</sup> Marcuse, H. (1955) *Reason and Revolution*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, p 65

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p 110

to be in a position to grasp the “reality [as] realization.”<sup>8</sup> Here the object appears to the collective subject as a known totality whose contradictions it can now aim to resolve.

Despite frequently praising Hegel’s “determinate negation” for both its critical and transformative potentials, Marcuse noted a significant problem with the idealist philosopher’s own system of thought. Although Hegel provided a framework within which one could both identify and potentially resolve the contradictions making up the social reality, he reduced the moment of “absolute freedom” to a process of self-reflection, thereby taking “refuge in the pure mind.”<sup>9</sup> It thus follows that while the subject can become conscious of a contradiction caused by a phenomenon such as estrangement in labour, it can only expect to resolve it by “reflecting into its own self in and from its other,”<sup>10</sup> i.e. as a purely intellectual exercise reduced to the discovery of the subject in the object, thus leaving the material conditions causing alienation unchanged. With the role of resolution assigned to the mind, then, Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* and his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* could only be expected to serve as a defence of a “reconciliation with the prevailing system”<sup>11</sup> rather than a call for its transformation. For this reason, Marcuse turned to Marx’s critique of alienated labour, which has been elaborated partly as a critique of Hegel’s idealism. As the member of the Frankfurt School put it:

Insight into objectification as insight into the historical and social situation of man reveals the historical conditions of this situation and so achieves the *practical force and concrete form* through which it can become the lever of the revolution. We can also understand how far questions concerning the *origin* of estrangement and insight into the *origin* of private property must be an integrating element in a positive theory of revolution.<sup>12</sup>

While Hegel’s dialectical thought was capable of uncovering contradictions, it could only be expected to resolve them theoretically, through the subject’s discovery of itself as substance of the reality. The subject, in other words, could only proceed with an insight into itself. The real, objective conditions for a phenomenon such as alienation, therefore, could not be identified, let alone be superseded, by adopting a

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<sup>8</sup> Marcuse, H. “A Note on Dialectic,” p 446

<sup>9</sup> Marcuse, H. *Reason and Revolution*, p 92

<sup>10</sup> Hegel, G.W. *The Phenomenology of Mind*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, London: George Allen and Unwin, pp 80-1

<sup>11</sup> Marcuse, H. *Reason and Revolution*, p 92

<sup>12</sup> Marcuse, H. “The Foundations of Historical Materialism,” in Marcuse, H. (1972) *Studies in Critical Philosophy*, Boston: Beacon Press, p 35

strictly Hegelian stance. With Marx's critique of the "vital activity" through which individuals transform both nature and themselves, i.e. labour, not only do "relations of things and 'natural' laws" appear as "relations of men and historical forces,"<sup>13</sup> thereby allowing for contradictions to be uncovered, but the *practical* origin of such contradictions is also revealed. Marx, then, endows critique with the insight required to turn it into a "practical force." As Marcuse himself put it, "insight [into objectification] is no mere theoretical cognition or arbitrary, passive intuition, but *praxis*: the supersession of what exists."<sup>14</sup> What is implied, then, by the elaboration of a theory aimed at informing revolutionary action is the notion that critique draws its practical potential from the mere fact that it addresses itself to objective conditions of existence. The combination of Hegel's discovery of the subject and Marx's insight into objectification as a basis for a transformative critique is nevertheless ridden with well known problems. Common to both Hegel's and Marx's systems of thought, and central to Marcuse's own critical theory, is the belief in the historical emergence of a self-conscious subject. While it is presented by Marcuse as a central element of his own critical theory and, as will be argued here, also constitutes the core source of its limitations, it falls short of undermining the transformative potential of some of his other key theoretical orientations.

A first and evident problem concerns Marcuse's defence of Hegel's second-stage negation. Although the former located the conditions of freedom outside the existing realm of social relations, his reliance on a historical subject for social transformation effectively reproduces a key concern expressed by Adorno in his critique of the primacy of the subject.<sup>15</sup> By presenting the resolution of contradictions, i.e. the identity of subject and object, as a process taking place in the consciousness of a revolutionary subject, he is forced to leave the absolutisation of a single relation between a concept and a particular, unproblematised, and ultimately reproduce epistemological conditions which Adorno had identified as sources of reification and totalisation. Marcuse's approach to transformative critique, then, *fails to safeguard critical theory against the repressive tendencies of identity-thinking*.

Furthermore, conscious of the specific problems that a highly rationalised and affluent society is likely to cause to the prospects of revolutionary emancipation,

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<sup>13</sup> Marcuse, H. *Reason and Revolution*, p 112

<sup>14</sup> Marcuse, H. "The Foundations of Historical Materialism," p 34-5

<sup>15</sup> See chapter two.

Marcuse no longer thought that the proletariat would be in a position to serve the interests of society as a whole. As a result, he undertook the task of formulating a theory of revolution independently of Marx's theory of class. According to him, "Marx's concept of labour has led far beyond the economic sphere."<sup>16</sup> Alienation, oppression, and exploitation have developed into conditions of existence that can no longer be confined to a particular economic group, but have in fact become the very "forms of life"<sup>17</sup> that a "new subject" would come to negate through the self-conscious re-appropriation of the world of objects. However, while the correlation between a critique of labour and the collective interest of the working class in taking part in revolutionary action was somewhat self-evident, a difficulty arises when one attempts to find such a correlation between diverse forms of resistance resulting from generalised conditions of existence and collective action. This is probably what led Marcuse to adopt a typically Marxian stance, namely a deterministic reliance on structural change or "shifting situation."<sup>18</sup> Indeed, like Marx, he identified several tendencies<sup>19</sup> indicating advanced capitalism's move towards self-destruction and the emergence of a free society. However, unlike Marx, who by presenting the proletariat as the "universal class" had provided an explanation for the translation of conscious experiences of alienation, oppression and exploitation into the material of collective action, Marcuse did not explore the mechanisms whereby individual experiences of negation and resistance could be translated into wider, collective ones,<sup>20</sup> thus leaving the medium through which the bearers of change can gain consciousness of their mutual interests unaccounted for. Even his latest work, entitled *The Aesthetic Dimension*, in which he exposed art's role in revealing the "exemplary fate of individuals,"<sup>21</sup> presented little evidence of any intention to explain how the so-called truths of art can become the very substance of a collective experience. Stripped of a theory of class, the fate of change is,

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p 14

<sup>17</sup> Marcuse, H. "A Note on Dialectic," p 450

<sup>18</sup> Marcuse, H. (1969) *An Essay on Liberation*, Boston: Beacon Press, p 53

<sup>19</sup> The tendencies leading to what Marcuse called the "Aesthetic Form" have been summarised as follows: "first of all the growing technological character of the process of production, with the reduction of the required physical energy and its replacement by mental energy – dematerialization of labor. At the same time, an increasingly automated machine system [...] would allow [...] the emergence of a free subject within the realm of necessity. Already today, the [...] material becomes increasingly susceptible and subject to aesthetic forms [...]" Marcuse, H. *An Essay on Liberation*, pp 49-50

<sup>20</sup> See Bernstein, R.J. "Negativity: Themes and Variations" in Pippin, R., Feenberg, A. and Webel, C.P. (eds.) (1988) *Marcuse: Critical Theory and the Promise of Utopia*. London: Macmillan Education, pp 24-5

<sup>21</sup> Marcuse, H. (1978) *The Aesthetic Dimension*. Boston: Beacon Press, p xi

as a result, forced to rely on a somewhat *providential* and undefined revolutionary consciousness.<sup>22</sup>

Thirdly, while Marcuse's revision of Marx's theory of revolution imposes real limitations upon the elaboration of a critical theory capable of justifying the emergence of a self-conscious subject engaging in revolutionary practice, it shall also be contended here that no resolution of the theory-practice riddle can be found until the wider issue of revolution-as-practice itself is re-assessed. Marcuse's critical social theory has been founded upon the presuppositions that radical change is both possible, and necessarily preceded by an explosion of society,<sup>23</sup> beginning with the "Great Refusal"<sup>24</sup> and culminating in revolutionary action. The risks of adopting such a standpoint, however, consist in allowing theory to treat revolutionary practice or civil disobedience as an end instead of a means. Indeed, by failing to anticipate the institutional framework likely to emerge in the aftermath of such an explosion, critical theory effectively displaces its expectations onto a form of practice limited to the destruction of the existing social relations, thus leaving other avenues for the implementation of radical change unaccounted for, and, more crucially, failing to protect action against a potentially pernicious opportunism rising out of the ashes of repression, and blossoming out of a system lacking the institutional maturity to produce non-oppressive social relations.<sup>25</sup> Marcuse's reliance on *practice-as-destruction*, therefore, contributed to the elaboration of a critical theory aimed at both informing a *reductionist*, *short-sighted*, and *hazardous* form of political action, and increasing the likelihood of reducing the radicalism of social criticism to a merely *destructive function*.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, despite Marcuse's apparent concern for social transformation, his reliance on the emergence of a self-conscious revolutionary subject ultimately causes him to favour theory over practice:

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<sup>22</sup> In his *An Essay on Liberation*, for example, Marcuse relied on the revolutionary potential of students and the Third World without clearly seeking to find out how and why they could perform the role of collective subject.

<sup>23</sup> See Marcuse, H. *One-dimensional Man*, p xv

<sup>24</sup> See Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*

<sup>25</sup> It will be shown below that despite insisting on the "positive" or constructive character of negation, Marcuse fails to solve such problems.

<sup>26</sup> The lack of a constructive component anticipating an alternative "life in common" in critical theory was in fact emphasised by Peter Wagner as a possible reason for the rise of individualism in the years following 1968. See Wagner, P. (2008) *Modernity as Experience and Interpretation: A New Sociology of Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press

Since the established universe of discourse is that of an unfree world, dialectical thought is necessarily destructive, and whatever liberation it may bring is a liberation in thought, in theory. However, the divorce of thought from action, of theory from practice, is itself part of the unfree world. No thought and no theory can undo it; but theory may help to prepare the ground for their possible reunion, and the ability of thought to develop a logic and language of contradiction is a prerequisite for this task.<sup>27</sup>

“Liberation in thought,” then, constitutes the central goal of both Adorno’s and Marcuse’s critical theory. The former warned against the “barbarism” of praxis and, consequently, favoured “open-thinking” above concerns regarding the translation of theory into political action.<sup>28</sup> Both did indeed believe that the nature of the “unfree world” is such that no unity of theory and practice is possible under its auspices, thereby assigning theory the central function in liberation. However, while Adorno’s pessimism could explain such a stance, Marcuse’s emphasis on the primacy of theory was in fact justified by his reliance on the eventual emergence of a collective subject. Such an asymmetry between theory and practice nevertheless raises several issues regarding the prospects of elaborating a form of critique aimed at social transformation. Indeed, in the case of Marcuse’s particular emphasis on the preparatory function of theory, not only does it involve a reliance on both providential change and a form of action potentially incapable of yielding sustainable social and institutional changes, it also fails to safeguard critical theory against a fall into contemplation. Critical theory must therefore attempt to transcend the reductionist interpretation of its own role as *theoretical resistance* to advanced capitalism, and be prepared to accept *challenging* its institutions with concrete proposals oriented towards the implementation of a political form lying somewhere beyond the existing reality (social democracy) and aesthetic negation. While Marcuse’s “language of contradictions” may succeed in revealing the internal inadequacies of advanced capitalism, it falls short of arming critical theory with the practical orientations required to turn it into a language effectively *contradicting the existing reality*. In order to overcome such limitations, I shall contend that the unity of theory and practice must become a priority of social criticism. In other words, the language of contradictions must no longer limit itself to a negation of the social reality assuming the form of theoretical resistance, but must begin to challenge it with sufficiently *radical* (beyond social democracy) and *constructive* (beyond mere negation)

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<sup>27</sup> Marcuse, H. “A Note on Dialectic,” p 449

<sup>28</sup> See Chapter two, part three.



alternatives to satisfy the demands of a critical theory oriented towards the institutionalisation of emancipatory practice. In the following section I shall seek to explore Marcuse's further contributions to critical theory, and find out whether they could in fact serve the realisation of the aforementioned project.

### *The Promises of the Principle of Negativity*

The principle of negativity underpins both Adorno's and Marcuse's critical theories. The role assigned by Adorno to his negative dialectics consisted in capturing the movement of what the reifying, totalising, and absolutising forces of identity-thinking led the individual to experience social reality as an immutable fact. With the capacity to grasp the reliance of "what is" on "what is not," he thought, the individual would be in a position to re-assess his or her relation to the social reality, and resist the institutional repression resulting from the ever-increasing rationalisation of the latter. By applying the principle of negativity, then, individuals would become capable of apprehending what appeared to them as a) the only possible relation between themselves and the wider social reality, and b) the only possible mediation between humanity and nature, as one configuration among various others, and eventually discover alternative ways of experiencing social life. Negative dialectics, therefore, equips individuals with the theoretical material to cease accepting the reality as it immediately appears to them by opening up an horizon of possibilities, albeit without the anticipation of a political alternative. Since Adorno's pessimism led him to present negative dialectics as a form of resistance against the existing state of affairs, the role assigned to the exposition of potentialities would effectively be reduced to a sort of *individual and protective intellectual shield* against institutional repression.<sup>29</sup>

Marcuse, however, appeared to hold higher expectations for the principle of negativity. The negation of the existing social reality, he thought, would eventually give rise to a new form of society. Thus, although he believed that to "tread on alien ground, external to the theory"<sup>30</sup> would consist in distracting critical theory away from the more

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<sup>29</sup> An affinity between Adorno's critical theory and Habermas's theory of communicative action could be identified here, for, as will be shown in chapter four, the latter's call for the maximisation of socially integrative resources under existing socio-political institutions ultimately limited his critical theory to a defence for a liberation in thought.

<sup>30</sup> Marcuse, H. "The Foundations of Historical Materialism," pp 4-5

pressing task of piercing the veil of reification, he maintained that the revelation of the contradictions would eventually serve as the material for revolutionary action:

The negation is determinate if it refers the established state of affairs to the basic factors and forces which make for its destructiveness, as well as for the possible alternatives beyond the status quo. In the human reality, they are *historical* factors and forces, and the determinate negation is ultimately a *political* negation.<sup>31</sup>

Negation is political inasmuch as the revelation of the contradictions does not merely consist of a contrast between “what is” and “what is not,” but sets a conception of “what ought to be” in opposition to the “is.” For Marcuse then, negative thinking does not limit itself to the revelation of potentialities, but is a process whereby the subject also strives to *realise* them. It is a “state of privation that forces the subject to seek remedy” and, as Marcuse claimed, is therefore endowed with a “positive character.”<sup>32</sup> In fact Hegel, who was the first to capture the movement of “spirit” as one underpinned by the principle of negativity, had himself pointed out that “the externalisation of self-consciousness has not merely negative, but positive significance.”<sup>33</sup> In virtue of its positive character, then, the principle of negativity cannot be expected to limit itself to the mere knowledge of the existence of human potentialities, but effectively drives individuals towards their realisation. Despite the problematic character of his concept of practice,<sup>34</sup> Marcuse offers an approach to negativity intrinsically compatible with the *challenge of a reality that “ought to be” with one that already “is.”* For this reason, I contend that negative dialectics does not necessarily limit the scope of critical theory to aporetic resistance, but could instead be re-formulated in such a way as to accept its role in providing a framework within which the realisation of the negativity principle’s *political potential* can immediately be employed to inform practice.

One is here nevertheless justified in asking exactly how Marcuse expected to realise negativity’s potential without “treading on alien ground” or, as Adorno would put it, how he could prevent his critical theory from falling into the illusory, and potentially hazardous, realm of a strictly transcendent critique.<sup>35</sup> The answer lies in his

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<sup>31</sup> Marcuse, H. “A Note on Dialectic,” p 449

<sup>32</sup> Marcuse, H. *Reason and Revolution*, p 66

<sup>33</sup> Hegel, G.W. *The Phenomenology of Mind*, p 789

<sup>34</sup> See section one of this chapter.

<sup>35</sup> See section three of chapter two.

adaptation of some of Freud's and Nietzsche's ideas, particularly those related to the "return of the repressed" and the "perpetuity of pleasure,"<sup>36</sup> respectively. Indeed, like the latter two thinkers, Marcuse believed in the possible re-surfacing of instincts. However, while Freud believed that such a return would manifest itself as a source of psychological disorders, the member of the Frankfurt School incorporated it in his critical theory to refer to the moment whereby negativity exposes the potentiality of reconciling humanity with internal nature, which a revolutionary subject would eventually seek to realise. Marcuse, then, identified the "what ought to be" uncovered by negativity as the positive expression of the "inherent truth values of the senses,"<sup>37</sup> which, in virtue of their being identified as repressed forms of life by the self-conscious subject, are not sought outside the immanent reality. The positive moment of Marcuse's principle of negativity, in other words, manifests itself as a form of life, i.e. the reconciliation of humanity and internal nature which Marcuse called the "Aesthetic Form," *repressed* by the heavily bureaucratised social reality, whilst also *constantly seeking realisation*. In this sense, the positive content of Marcuse's principle of negativity equips critical theory with the utopian moment required in order to become *technically capable of challenging the existing reality, whilst retaining the immanent character necessary to prevent it from developing into fiction*.

As soon as his *affirmative principle of negativity* is combined with a concept of practice both understood as a destructive moment and founded upon the emergence of a providential revolutionary consciousness, however, the capacity of Marcuse's critical theory to challenge the existing social reality is forced to face significant limitations. As the principle underpinning the great refusal, negativity may indeed serve immediately practical ends, but since the form of practice it is meant to inform consists of civil disobedience culminating in revolutionary action, Marcuse effectively stripped the utopian content of a direct role in practice and, by reducing negativity to "the protest against that which is,"<sup>38</sup> ultimately let the utopian moment – the vaguely defined "Aesthetic Form" – of his critical theory recede into the background to favour the seemingly more urgent task of civil disobedience. It shall therefore be contended that in order to overcome such limitations and turn critical theory into a force capable of challenging the existing social order, not only must it strive to inform practice directly,

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<sup>36</sup> Marcuse, H. "Progress and Freud's Theory of Instincts" in Marcuse, H. (1970) *Five Lectures: psychoanalysis, politics, and utopia*. London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, p 41

<sup>37</sup> Marcuse, H. (1969) *Eros and Civilization*. London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, p 181

<sup>38</sup> Marcuse, H. *One-Dimensional Man*, p 63

it must do so by attributing the utopian content of negativity a key function in the process, i.e. by ensuring that the *utopian* moment plays as central a role in practice as its *critical* counterpart. Such a task would involve the *translation of the return of the repressed into a political programme directed towards the implementation of alternative material conditions and corresponding socio-political institutions*. To use Marcuse's own terms, critical theory must no longer rely on a "shifting situation," but must instead serve as a *force steering the tendencies within advanced capitalism towards the "Aesthetic Form."* The absence of a clearly identifiable collective revolutionary subject does indeed make such role for critical theory all the more pressing, necessary and justified.

So far, I have contended that not only should critical theory aim to alter the objective reality through mediated unity of theory and practice, it must also accept that success in achieving such a goal is presupposed by the presence of an active utopian element. In his essay entitled "Resignation," however, Adorno expressed his concerns regarding any attempt to elaborate a critical theory on the basis of such propositions. With both Marx's theory of revolution and the Soviet experience in mind, Adorno argued that "thinking, employed only as an instrument of action, is blunted in the same way as all instrumental reason."<sup>39</sup> Such an attempt to unite theory and practice, he believed, would turn knowledge into a means for the mastery of the social reality, and with it, transform the relation between the subject and the object into one whereby the former seeks to dominate the latter. As such critical theory would effectively create the conditions favouring the unfolding of reason into a medium supporting the primacy of the subject, and the resulting "prohibition of thinking."<sup>40</sup> Adorno, therefore, associates any attempt to unite theory and practice, at least prematurely, with the suppression of thinking – itself a fundamental condition for the development of repressive conditions of existence. Whilst such a view rightly emphasises the risks of reproducing the subject-object asymmetry in practice, the most significant element conducting this member of the Frankfurt School to reach such a conclusion is nevertheless derived from an orthodox, and somewhat problematic, interpretation of a particular form of practice, namely Marx's. Indeed, what effectively led Adorno to reject *praxis*,<sup>41</sup> when achieved under duress, as a desirable project, is the view that since Marx reduced practice to the

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<sup>39</sup> Adorno, T.W. "Resignation," p 202

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p 199

<sup>41</sup> The term *praxis* is used here in the Marxist sense, namely to refer to the unity of theory and practice. In his essay "Resignation," however, Adorno employs the term to refer to practice.

“increased production of the means of production,”<sup>42</sup> he was forced to approach the relation between humanity and nature from the standpoint of domination, thereby abandoning “criticism” in favour of a form of knowledge subjected to, and supporting the primacy of practice. As a result, Adorno failed to account for the implicit thesis of Marx’s concept of labour,<sup>43</sup> and was therefore unable to anticipate the possibility of uniting theory and practice in such a way as to cultivate the critical content of thinking. It shall be contended here that Marx’s concept of *labour as self-realisation* in fact offers a framework within which *the reconciliation of humanity and nature can be realised, the non-identity of subject and object maintained, and the principle of negativity perform an emancipatory function.*<sup>44</sup>

Having established, in chapter two, that the success of *praxis* depends on critical theory’s capacity to anticipate a concept of practice capable of accommodating constellation thinking, one is now justified in asking how exactly the translation of the utopian content into a practical force can be prevented from undermining the possibility of engaging in “open thinking”?<sup>45</sup> While Adorno eventually came to regard the task of steering society towards what it “ought to be” as a course of action antagonistic to the principle of negativity, Marcuse presented the utopian content as an inherent component to it. The latter also recognised that “the critical theory which is to guide political practice still lags behind,”<sup>46</sup> thereby making the unity of theory and practice a desirable goal. However, since he understood political practice as a “methodical disengagement from and refusal of the Establishment [...] aiming at the transvaluation of values,” his proposed unity of theory and practice not only prioritised destructive resistance over constructive challenge, but also clearly excluded the direct involvement of utopia in political action.<sup>47</sup> Thus, although Marcuse offered a basis upon which to combine negativity and utopia, his conflation of criticism and practice implies that whilst critical theory can oppose the values of the “Aesthetic Form” to those belonging to the existing

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p 200

<sup>43</sup> See chapter one.

<sup>44</sup> Further insights into such a form of *praxis* will be provided in the next section, and more extensively discussed in the last two chapters of the present work.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p 202. The term “open thinking” which Adorno uses in his essay entitled “Resignation” could effectively be another way to designate the form of knowledge he believed to be required to maintain the non-identity of the subject and the object. Constellation thinking, in the sense, can be described as a form of open thinking.

<sup>46</sup> Marcuse, H. *An Essay on Liberation*, p 6

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p 6. Despite insisting on the “positive” character of negation, then, Marcuse favoured spontaneous resistance over “a theoretically well founded and elaborated strategy.” Such a stance was partly prompted by his belief that one is not in a position to grasp the objective conditions of the future society. Marcuse, H. *An Essay on Liberation*, p 53

order, the fear of “treading on alien ground” eventually turns it, at best, into a destructive project and, at worst, into a contemplative one. It shall therefore be contended here that critical theory must overcome such a fear and finally accept that *the insight into objectification does not merely remain critical but also involves a utopian component*, and begin to address the objective conditions required for emancipation by translating the principles underpinning such a utopian content, i.e. the “Aesthetic Form,” into the material conditions and alternative socio-political institutions guiding political practice in its challenge of the existing social reality. In order to do so, however, critical theory must first ensure that the unity of theory and practice is prevented from causing the suppression of thinking. The proposed material conditions and institutional arrangement, then, must be able to guarantee the preservation of the non-identity of subject and object, which involves giving the former the constant possibility to negate the latter.<sup>48</sup> Thinking, in this sense, would not limit its scope to action and fall into the reductionist realm of instrumentality, but by reaching beyond civil disobedience and revolutionary practice, and into the material conditions required for the emergence of an institutional framework capable of guaranteeing the perpetuity of the non-identity of subject and object, its scope would in fact be extended to the promotion of thinking itself, thus satisfying the conditions Adorno had identified for constellation thinking. Before identifying the material conditions in question, and drawing the contours of the institutional framework corresponding to them, however, one must first explore the content of the “Aesthetic Form.”

### *Utopia and Practice*

Like Freud, Marcuse observed that since the conflict between instinctual gratification and the imperative of social order has historically and continuously been resolved in favour of the former, “the history of man” has effectively assumed the form of a “history of repression.”<sup>49</sup> In contrast with the psychoanalyst, however, Marcuse believed in a possible, and somewhat inevitable, resolution of such a conflict without

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<sup>48</sup> Habermas was the first member of the Frankfurt School to anticipate the institutionalisation of non-identity thinking. However, as will be shown in the following chapters, his critical theory eventually served to reconcile individuals with the existing socio-political institutions rather than assisting the former in their challenge of the latter.

<sup>49</sup> Marcuse, H. *Eros and Civilization*, p 11-12

the domination of the “reality principle” over the “pleasure principle.” In fact, in his most generic formulations, he presented the “Aesthetic Form” as the historical stage marking the “reconciliation between pleasure and reality principle.”<sup>50</sup> Although Marcuse believed the task of exploring the new organisation of the productive forces (institutions) to be lying outside the scope of critical theory, several discussions more or less scattered throughout his works not only presented the aforementioned reconciliation as the fundamental axiom underpinning his utopian content, but also revealed its implications for the material and cultural conditions (foundations) of the aesthetic form.

As the product of negative thinking, Marcuse’s utopian content rests on theory’s capacity to develop into a critical force. To do so, reason, which under the domination of the reality principle over the pleasure principle treats “phantasy as a separate mental process,”<sup>51</sup> must accept that as a critical force it effectively “originates in [...] value-judgment,”<sup>52</sup> thereby recognising its convergence with, rather than opposing, aesthetic judgements. As the exclusive realm of the aesthetic form in advanced capitalist societies, then, art serves as an outlet for the conversion of reason into a subversive force:

In contrast to Orthodox Marxist aesthetics I see the political potential of art in art itself, in the aesthetic form as such. Furthermore, I argue that by virtue of its aesthetic form, art is largely autonomous *vis a vis* the given social relations, and at the same time transcends them. Thereby art subverts the dominant consciousness, the ordinary experience.<sup>53</sup>

Dismissed by several Marxists as infected by, and an ally of, capitalist relations and forces of production, art is here being presented by Marcuse as an autonomous sphere and central medium of liberation. He therefore located the seeds of emancipation in what are thought to be the last vestiges of the aesthetic form within a heavily rationalised society, and believed that although “[a]rt cannot change the world [...] it can contribute to changing the consciousness and drives of the men and women who could change the world.”<sup>54</sup> Once matured, however, such a revolutionary consciousness would seek to turn the aesthetic form into the basis for the generalised “order of

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p 151

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p 142

<sup>52</sup> Marcuse, H. *One-Dimensional Man*, p 220

<sup>53</sup> Marcuse, H. *The Aesthetic Dimension*, p xi

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, pp 32-3

values”<sup>55</sup> of the new society by making art’s “traditional function [...] obsolete.”<sup>56</sup> As the negation of a heavily bureaucratised form of life, such an “abolition of art” would indeed mark both the destruction of the repressive society, and the advent of a new, non-repressive order founded upon “a harmony of the mental faculties”<sup>57</sup> so far rendered unrealisable by the capitalist division of labour. Once reconciled with reason, then, aesthetic judgements can begin to enter the sphere of labour and affect it in such a way that “the convergence of technology and art and the convergence of work and play”<sup>58</sup> effectively underpin the material conditions of a new order. Marcuse’s reconciliation of the pleasure and reality principles, therefore, assumes the form of a “harmony of the mental faculties” presupposed by the development of the recognition of the “cognitive and emancipatory power of sensuousness”<sup>59</sup> realised through autonomous works of art, into a fundamental condition of existence whereby the senses are capable of performing a socially useful and productive function, brought about by the abolition of art itself as emancipatory practice.

Marcuse, in fact, believed in the historical possibility of a form of civilisation – the “Aesthetic Form” – whereby instinctual energies enter the process of production as the realisation of already existing and creative potentialities formally excluded from such a process as a result of the division of labour and, as such, was also keen to emphasise the fact that such a phenomenon was presupposed by the release of such energies under non-repressive conditions of existence. To be prevented from assuming a chaotic character, and become a productive force in the satisfaction of needs, the release of instinctual energies must nevertheless be subject to a certain degree of control. As Marcuse himself pointed out:

To be sure, if freedom is to become the governing principle of civilization, not only reason but also the sensuous impulse requires a restraining transformation. The additional release of sensuous energy must conform with the universal order of freedom. However, whatever order would have to be imposed upon the sensuous impulse must itself be “an operation of freedom.” The free individual himself must bring about the harmony between individual and universal gratification. In a truly free civilization, all laws are self-given by the individuals: “to give freedom by freedom is the universal law” of the “aesthetic state”; in a truly free civilization, “the

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<sup>55</sup> Marcuse, H. “Progress and Freud’s Theory of Instincts,” p 41

<sup>56</sup> Marcuse, H. *The Aesthetic Dimension*, p 28

<sup>57</sup> Marcuse, H. *Eros and Civilisation*, in Marcuse, H. p 179

<sup>58</sup> Marcuse, H. “The End of Utopia,” in Marcuse, H. (1970) *Five Lectures: Psychoanalysis, Politics, and Utopia*. London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, p 68

<sup>59</sup> Marcuse, H. *The Aesthetic Dimension*, p 66



will of the whole” fulfils itself only “through the nature of the individual.” Order is freedom only if it is founded on and sustained by the free gratification of the individuals.<sup>60</sup>

In order to become “an operation of freedom,” restrictions imposed by the heavily administered society must be removed to be replaced by others laid down by the free individuals themselves. The logic of this “non-repressive sublimation”<sup>61</sup> assuming the form of “self-sublimation,”<sup>62</sup> effectively derives from the belief that if “free gratification” becomes universal, the reconciliation of reason and the senses that such a process would involve, would ultimately serve the reconciliation between individuals themselves. Implicit in such a view is the notion that the harmony of individual and universal gratification effectively depends on the *primacy of the particular*.<sup>63</sup> What is meant here is the fact that freedom would no longer be understood as a state of affairs involving limitations imposed by reason upon the will and resulting in the subsumption of particularity under universality, i.e. negative freedom, but that it would instead manifest itself as a condition of existence whereby the individual would make his/her free gratification the primary goal of his/her actions. Since Marcuse’s positive conception of freedom depends on a reconciliation of subject and object, it is capable of transcending the *competitive and self-interested inclinations* corresponding to negative types of freedom, and yield *cooperative* forms of behaviour. While the principle of *self-preservation* underpins a society assuming the form of an *aggregate of competing self-interests*, the reconciliation of the pleasure and reality principles underpinning the “Aesthetic Form” gives rise to a harmony of *free* and *cooperative self-gratifications*. Social order, here, would therefore be maintained through the reconciliation of reason and the senses, yielded by the productive and socially cohesive process of self-sublimation, and actualised under non-repressive conditions of existence. It follows, then, that the emergence of the “Aesthetic Form” crucially rests on the presence of institutions capable of both achieving the abolition of art and accommodating the self-sublimation of the senses.

The institutions of advanced capitalism, underpinned by the principle of self-preservation and modelled around the capitalist division of labour, have both developed from, and served to cultivate, a conception of reason stifling the release of instinctual

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<sup>60</sup> Marcuse, H. *Eros and Civilization*, p 191

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p 218

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p 210

<sup>63</sup> The phrase echoes Adorno’s call for the “primacy of the object” in his essay entitled “Subject and Object.”

energies. Despite making numerous references to the general morphology of the “Aesthetic Form,” Marcuse always approached it from the standpoint of the subjectivity of experience, and consistently held back from venturing into an exploration of its objective counterpart. In fact it could be argued that Marcuse’s “failure to come to grips theoretically with the problem of social objectivity”<sup>64</sup> was caused by his reliance upon the development of a new sensibility thought to culminate in the unity of theory of practice brought about by a yet-to-be-known revolutionary subject. As I have already contended, a critical theory aiming to actualise emancipatory practice cannot afford to ground the prospects of change on a providential collective subject. Instead, the unity of theory and practice should involve the translation of the utopian content into the immediate goal of critical theory. In other words, critical theory must inform a form of political action both aiming to abolish art by seeking to *transform labour into a process of free gratification*, and *steering the tendencies* within capitalism towards the creation of *conditions favourable for the universal self-sublimation* of the senses by ensuring that the *free gratification of one individual becomes the precondition for the free gratification of another*. It could therefore be suggested that what Marcuse understood by the “convergence of art and technology” as the “harmony between individual and universal gratification” not only echoes Marx’s implicit approach to labour as a socially cohesive process of self-realisation, but is also best served by assigning free labour the role of mediation in such a process.<sup>65</sup> In practical terms, then, the reconciliation of the pleasure and reality principles involves both a change of the purpose of production into one whereby both the transformation of nature itself is a process of self-realisation, i.e. an end in itself, and the satisfaction of the needs of an individual is consciously experienced by another as an integral part of his/her own self-realisation. While the former element is presupposed by an effective *control* over the productive process by the producers, the latter depends on the institutionalisation of a *dialogue between the two dimensions of self-realisation*, namely production and consumption.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Schmidt, A. “Existential Ontology and Historical Materialism in the Work of Herbert Marcuse” in Feenberg, A., Pippin, R., and Webel C.P. (1988) *Marcuse: Critical Theory and the Promise of Utopia*, London: Macmillan, p 56

<sup>65</sup> For a detailed account of Marx’s concept of labour see chapter one of the present work.

<sup>66</sup> The term “dimension” is being favoured over “sphere” in order to emphasise the *necessary* relationship between production and consumption. Chapters six and seven of the present work shall aim to explore further the nature of such a relationship.

### *Concluding Remarks*

As a member of the Frankfurt School particularly confident and enthusiastic about the prospects of change, Marcuse elaborated a critical theory thought to perform a central function in the practical transformation of the social reality. By uniting theory with a concept of practice understood as a unity of subject and object and reduced to a merely destructive function, however, Marcuse not only failed to safeguard critical theory *against* both epistemological and institutional forms of repression, he also fell short of realising the potentially *constructive* function of the utopian content unfolded by his principle of negativity. It has therefore been suggested that in order to overcome such limitations and realise the transformative potential of critical theory, the latter ought to be revised in such a way as to both include an insight into the *objective* conditions, i.e. the socio-political institutions, favourable for the reconciliation of humanity and nature (universal free gratification) and turn the unity of theory and practice (the abolition of art) into its immediate goal. It was finally argued that the realisation of the aforementioned reconciliation would be presupposed by the *transformation* of labour into a sphere of self-realisation, and its institutionalisation as a *dialogical mediation* between particularity (individual free gratification) and universality (universal free gratification). However, can labour as collective self-realisation also serve as a basis upon which the non-identity of subject and object be maintained, i.e. where self-realisation is collective without being collectivised? Can it be expected to produce the epistemological forms required for emancipation? The next two chapters shall attempt to answer these questions by exploring the works of the member of the Frankfurt School who was first to anticipate the institutionalisation of the non-identity of subject and object, namely Habermas.

## **Chapter 4**

### The Premises of Institutionalised Emancipatory practice.

In the last chapter I sought to explore the manner in which the transformative potential of critical theory could be maximised. It was shown that the success of such a task depends upon critical theory's orientation towards the implementation of an institutional framework capable of creating the conditions of existence required for reconciliation. However, it was not until Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* that explicit considerations of such a nature made their way into the Frankfurt School tradition. The present chapter shall therefore address the relevant theoretical developments pursued by the second-generation Frankfurt School theorist, and explore their implications for critical theory's practical content.

#### ***Habermas, Modernity, and Emancipation***

Habermas shared very similar concerns to those expressed by other members of the Frankfurt School. Like them, he sought to understand the development of capitalism into its "advanced" form as a phenomenon closely connected with the seemingly unstoppable spread of instrumental rationality thought to be detrimental to the prospects of human emancipation. Habermas also shared with the earlier generation of critical social theorists the view that the development from liberal to advanced capitalism not only corresponded to an alteration in the nature of domination and consequently to a change in the way individuals related to the world around them, but also called for the elaboration of a social critique capable of addressing such changes. However, Habermas's optimism with respects to the promises of the Enlightenment caused his critical theory to depart significantly from those of his predecessors. With Habermas, then, modernity would no longer be interpreted as a constellation of economic, social and cultural forces, all failing to create the conditions favourable for human emancipation, but is now thought to consist in an "unfinished" project,<sup>1</sup> whose

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<sup>1</sup> Habermas, J. "Modernity : An Unfinished Project" in Calhoun, C. et al (2007) *Contemporary Sociological Theory*, Oxford: Blackwell.

completion thus becomes the task of critical theory. It is in this particular context that Habermas presented modern societies as ones characterised by not one, but two forms of rationality – instrumental and communicative – which he, later in his work, described as the differentiation between “system” and “lifeworld.”

Although clearly indebted to Weber’s distinction between instrumental rationality (*Zweckrationalität*) and value-rationality (*Wertrationalität*),<sup>2</sup> it is through a reconstruction of Marx’s historical materialism that Habermas begins to re-assess the achievements of modernity. Central to the critical theorist’s early works is the view that despite the high level attained by the productive forces – a level indicating humanity’s success in mastering the forces of external nature – modernity had fallen short of yielding conditions favourable for the development of a class consciousness seeking human emancipation, thereby calling into question the validity of Marx’s base/superstructure schema. Whilst the first generation critical theorists concluded that the failed emancipation of internal nature was inextricably linked to processes involved in humanity’s relation with external nature,<sup>3</sup> Habermas was critical of such a holistic approach to modernity, which, like Marx’s, reduces the epistemological achievements of the modern age to the rise of instrumental reason. The prospects of emancipation, Habermas thought, depend on the evolution of two distinct logics of action:

A society owes emancipation from the external forces of nature to labor processes, that is to the production of technically exploitable knowledge (including ‘the transformation of the natural sciences into machinery’). Emancipation from the compulsion of internal nature succeeds to the degree that institutions based on force are replaced by an organization of social relations that is bound only to communication free from domination. This does not occur directly through productive activity, but rather through the revolutionary activity of struggling classes (including the critical activity of reflective sciences).<sup>4</sup>

With Habermas, then, the reflexive activity of social agents is no longer directly determined by the sphere of activity geared towards the transformation of external nature. The success of bourgeois ideology in hindering the revolutionary struggle of the working class should indeed serve to confirm the distinction between the two spheres of activity, for if class consciousness depended *solely* on “the growing potential of control

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<sup>2</sup> Habermas makes his debt to, and criticism of, Weber most explicit in his work *The Theory of Communicative Action*.

<sup>3</sup> See chapter two.

<sup>4</sup> Habermas, J. (1987) *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Cambridge: Polity Press, p 53

over the natural processes objectified in work,” the superstructure would transparently *reveal*, and fail to succeed in *concealing*, the alienating and exploitative conditions under which material reproduction takes place.<sup>5</sup> Somewhere along the line, therefore, the “object of conflict” had to be made “unrecognizable for both parties, capitalists as well as wage laborers.”<sup>6</sup> Whilst such observations suggest that consciousness emerges as a result of processes distinguishable from those involved in material reproduction Marx, according to Habermas, claimed that the self-reflexive activity necessitated for the supersession of false-consciousness – a distortion made possible by the ostensible exchange of equivalents legitimated by market relations – depends on the level of development attained by the productive forces. As such, his “critique of commodity fetishism” may be able to reveal the distorted nature of communication in bourgeois societies, but falls short of identifying the *distinctive* character and *full range* of the processes involved in the development of such a distortion, thus overlooking the analytical distinction between a logic of action geared towards “emancipation from external constraints” and another seeking to eliminate “repressions of internal nature.”<sup>7</sup> Consequently, Habermas argued, a social theory aiming to identify the conditions required for human emancipation must be reconstructed in such a way as to accommodate both levels of analysis.

Several sociological and epistemological inferences can be drawn from Habermas’s distinction of the two logics of emancipation. Firstly, and from a sociological standpoint, the distinction effectively corresponds to a differentiation between processes of social integration which involve “systems of institutions in which speaking and acting subjects are socially related” (interaction), and processes of system integration maintaining “their boundaries and their continued existence by mastering the complexity of an inconstant environment” (work).<sup>8</sup> The evolution of the human species, then, can be fully comprehended only by differentiating the evolutionary dynamics of

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p 61

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p 59

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p 55. Combined with the passage cited above, such an assertion equates the logic of emancipation of internal nature with the liberation of the *intellectual-cognitive* functions of the human species. The implications of such an emphasis on the cognitive faculties in emancipation will be addressed in chapter five.

<sup>8</sup> Habermas, J. (1988) *Legitimation Crisis*, London: Polity Press, p 4. It must be pointed out here that from *Legitimation Crisis* onwards, Habermas no longer refers to the distinction between social and system integration made in *Knowledge and Human Interests* in terms of “work” and “interaction,” but replaces the two terms by “system” and “lifeworld” respectively. “Work” and “interaction” are nevertheless used here to emphasise the difference between Habermas’s social theory and Marx’s own.

the “self-formative” and “self-generative” spheres and not, as Marx understood it, by reducing the former to the “self-generative act.”<sup>9</sup> Consequently:

the introduction of new forms of social integration, as for instance, the replacement of the kinship system with the state, demands knowledge of a practical-moral kind. Technical knowledge, which can be implemented with rules of instrumental and strategic action, or an expansion of our control over external nature, is not what is required, but, rather, a knowledge which can seek its embodiment in structures of interaction. We can understand the development of the productive forces as a problem-generating mechanism that *releases* but does not *create* the evolutionary renewal of the mode of production.<sup>10</sup>

Secondly, then, the constitution of knowledge follows two *distinct* trajectories. On the one hand, the knowledge constituted in the sphere of work, where actions are oriented towards the mastery of the forces of external nature, is said to embody the “technical” or *manipulative* interest of reason. Here, individuals relate to nature and each other through the steering mechanisms of “power” and “money,” which cause their actions to be governed by imperatives of *efficiency* and *productivity*, also known as “systemic imperatives.” On the other hand, when actions are oriented towards “mutual understanding,” such as those found in the sphere of interaction, the knowledge arising therefrom is constituted on the basis of what Habermas termed the “practical” or *normative* interest of reason. Since this particular sphere of activity comprises individuals reflecting on their internal nature and interacting on a strictly intersubjective basis – between individuals and internal nature – relations are now mediated by the communicative mechanisms of “language” and “symbols,” thereby causing their actions to be governed by the *consensual* and *deliberative* principles of “practical discourse.” Following Adorno and Horkheimer’s analysis in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the rise of instrumental reason, then, ought to be understood as the epistemological manifestation of the human interest in technical control, spreading over the entire history of the human species.<sup>11</sup> A social theory seeking to identify the conditions favourable for human emancipation, Habermas contends, ought to give recognition to the sociological and corresponding epistemological distinction between work and

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<sup>9</sup> Habermas, J. *Knowledge and Human Interests*, pp 43-63

<sup>10</sup> Habermas, J. “Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism,” *Theory and Society*, Vol. 2, No. 3, Autumn 1975, p 293

<sup>11</sup> The instrumental mastery of nature, whose affinity with the Enlightenment project Adorno and Horkheimer sought to reveal, can in fact be traced “back to the beginning of traditional history.” Adorno, T.W. and Horkheimer, M. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p 44

interaction, for the “emancipatory interest” of such a critical social theory itself effectively depends “on the interests in possible intersubjective action-orientation and in possible technical control.”<sup>12</sup> It therefore follows that the unfinished character of modernity and its project of emancipation cannot be fully grasped unless it is re-articulated as a problem connected with the failure to introduce an institutional framework providing conditions favourable for the exercise of communication free from domination, rather than a failure to reconcile humanity with external nature.<sup>13</sup> It is in the light of these observations that Habermas re-assesses the development from liberal to advanced capitalism.

Whilst Habermas’s reconstruction of historical materialism aimed to overcome the latter’s incapacity to address the distinct sociological and epistemological character of interaction, it did not originally intend – at least before the linguistic turn taken by his work from *The Theory of Communicative Action* onwards – to result in an outright rejection of all of its key tenets. In fact he agreed with Marx as regards to the economic nature of the relations of production in the modern age:

The identification of substructure with economic structure could lead to the assumption that the substructural level is equivalent to the economic system. That is, however, valid only for modern societies. Relations of production are defined by their function in regulating access to the means of production and indirectly the distribution of social wealth. This function is assumed in primitive societies by kinship systems and in traditional societies by political institutions. It is not until the market, in addition to its cybernetic function, also takes over the function of stabilizing class relations that the relations of production assume a purely economic form.<sup>14</sup>

The central aim of Habermas’s critique of Marx, therefore, was to historicise the latter’s base/superstructure schema as one only applicable to the modern age and, more specifically, to a critique of “the [liberal] capitalist principle of organization,”<sup>15</sup> whilst reconstructing it to include the two aforementioned levels of analysis required to turn it into a critique of society capable of grasping the strictly modern social conditions whereby the “uncoupling of the state and the economy” provided the institutional

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p 211

<sup>13</sup> The contrast between Habermas’s position and the previous generation of Frankfurt School theorists, especially Marcuse’s, is here evident. This position is stated most clearly in his essay entitled “Science and Technology as Ideology.”

<sup>14</sup> Habermas, J. “Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism,” p 292

<sup>15</sup> Habermas, J. *Legitimation Crisis*, p 23. Although here Habermas does not himself qualify the stage of capitalist development in question, the section entitled “liberal-capitalist formation” from which the quote was extracted makes it clear that he is referring to the early period of the modern age.



framework within which the “socially integrative functions”<sup>16</sup> previously performed by the political system could be transferred to “a subsystem that primarily fulfills system integrative functions,”<sup>17</sup> namely the market. As such, the *dynamics* involved in the distortion of communication could, as Marx insisted in his critique of the fetishism of commodities,<sup>18</sup> be explained by the “double function” performed by the market as “steering mechanism” (through the medium of money) and ideology (through the symbols generated by the “value form”) but their *origins* and conditions for their *dissolution*, Habermas contends, can only be adequately grasped from a standpoint lying outside the sphere of work and capable of uncovering the interplay between communicative and instrumental forms of knowledge.<sup>19</sup> Thus, in order to discard the veil of distorted communication arising from the social conditions of existence found within the liberal capitalist framework, the phenomenon itself must first be explained as a transfer of the function of social integration over to the market, and problematised as a conflict between the *power-driven* character of the social relations governed by instrumental rationality and the *consensual* nature of those developing under the rule of its communicative counterpart.

However, the age of bourgeois capitalism was also marked by a significant achievement. The uncoupling of state and economy,<sup>20</sup> or “depoliticisation of the relations of production,” resulted in the creation of a social space permitting individuals to interact on the basis of communication free from domination:

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p 25

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p 25. It must be noted here that, from *The Theory of Communicative Action* onwards, Habermas abandons the differentiation “between the action systems of state and economy,” and begins to approach the state itself as an administrative system also governed by systemic imperatives. The implications for his theory of democracy – which will be dealt with in more details below – are not negligible. In fact, it meant that, as an institution governed by principles of efficiency and productivity (“systemic imperatives”) the state could not be “transformed democratically from within.” Habermas, J. “Further Reflections on the Public Sphere,” in Calhoun, C. (ed) (1992) *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: MIT Press pp 443-4.

<sup>18</sup> Marx made his concern for the distorted nature of interaction in the following passage: “The equality of all sorts of human labour is expressed objectively by their products all being equally values; the measure of the expenditure of labour power by the duration of that expenditure takes the form of the quantity of value of the products of labour; and finally, the mutual relations of the producers, within which the social character of their labour affirms itself, take the form of a social relation between the products.” Marx, K. *Capital*, in McLellan, D. (2000) *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p 472

<sup>19</sup> See chapter three of *Knowledge and Human Interests*

<sup>20</sup> It follows that a re-coupling of state and economy would effectively correspond to their re-federalisation; a phenomenon witnessed with the emergence of state-controlled economies such as those found in state-socialist countries. From such a standpoint, this alternative to capitalism stands in sharp opposition to the “political emancipation” Marx thought to be required for human emancipation. See Marx’s “On the Jewish Question.”

The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people who come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason (*öffentliches Raisonement*).<sup>21</sup>

Individuals could, for the first time in history, engage with “the public authorities themselves” and make use of a “morally pretentious rationality that strove to discover what was once just and right,” thus finding the means to form a “public opinion” which would ultimately serve as “the only legitimate source of th[e] law.”<sup>22</sup> Access to such a space of subversive self-reflexive practice was nevertheless limited. Only autonomous individuals, or, as Kant put it, those free “*from self-incurred immaturity*” could expect to participate in such *democratic* processes.<sup>23</sup> In a bourgeois society, i.e. a society where relations of production assume an economic form, the free “*homme*,” as the only person capable of being his own (moral) master, is the “property-owning private person” who, as Habermas observed, could *appear* “morally free” precisely due to the apparent “justice immanent in free commerce.”<sup>24</sup> The moral freedom of the bourgeois was, therefore, nothing more than a “fiction.” Thus, although the emergence of a public sphere mediating the state and civil society consisted in a hitherto unseen and potentially liberating social development, the fact that the socially integrative functions happened to be performed by a system founded on an exchange of equivalents such as the market effectively concealed the “conflation of *bourgeois* and *homme*” as *citoyen*,<sup>25</sup> thereby making the communicative freedom of the public sphere particularly vulnerable to “processes of concentration and crisis” that would eventually “pull[...] the veil of an exchange of equivalents off the antagonistic structure of society.”<sup>26</sup> The emergence of the bourgeois public sphere, therefore, heavily depended on the distorting tendencies of the market as a system of social integration, whose incapacity to prevent the development of conflicts of interests into organised private-interest groups eventually led to “structural transformation of the public sphere” and the

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<sup>21</sup> Habermas, J. (1989) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, London: Polity Press, p 27

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p 54.

<sup>23</sup> Kant, I. “What is Enlightenment?”, p 54

<sup>24</sup> Habermas, J. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p 111. Habermas is here referring to the process of exchange of equivalents ultimately giving market relations their “fair” appearance.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p 111

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p 144

corresponding demise of the subversive function of public opinion. It was such a transformation that marked the advent of the latest stage in capitalist development and led to the highly problematic spread of instrumental reason.

Although Habermas problematised from diverse angles<sup>27</sup> the development of capitalism into its advanced stage, all of the accounts in question have been underpinned by one of his primary concerns, namely the distortion of communication and its effects on modernity's capacity to realise its promises. Under advanced capitalism, then:

The social potential of science is reduced to the powers of technical control – its potential for enlightened action is no longer considered. [...] Emancipation by means of enlightenment is replaced by instruction in control over objective or objectified processes. Socially effective theory is no longer directed toward the consciousness of human beings who live together and discuss matters with each other, but to the behavior of human beings who manipulate.<sup>28</sup>

In what Habermas also called the “scientific civilization,” the interest in technical control spreads to such an extent that it subjects all forms of knowledge to its own imperatives, thus causing an *identity* of the two logics of action – work and interaction – assuming the form of a subsumption of the normative fabric of society under the power-driven actions of instrumental reason. What, then, are the changes that have led to such a state of affairs?

The incapacity of the market to solve its socially integrative “functional weaknesses” and “dysfunctional side effects” as steering mechanism, has led the state to re-appropriate the latter functions.<sup>29</sup> Since the role of the state as steering mechanism meant that it would have to become “actively engaged in” the “general conditions of production,”<sup>30</sup> we are effectively witnessing, under the advanced capitalist stage, a “re-coupling of state and economy” and the corresponding repoliticisation of relations of

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<sup>27</sup> For example, whereas in *Legitimation Crisis* Habermas problematises the move from the liberal to capitalist stage in terms of a “shift by the political system into the economic system,” in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, problems characterising the latter stage are re-articulated into processes of “colonization” of the lifeworld by systemic imperatives. One can also distinguish accounts of a sociological character (such as those provided in *Legitimation Crisis*) and others assuming a characteristically epistemological form (such as those found in *Theory and Practice* and *Knowledge and Human Interests*).

<sup>28</sup> Habermas, J. (1974) *Theory and Practice*, London : Heinemann, pp 254-5

<sup>29</sup> Habermas, J. *Legitimation Crisis*, p 36. According to Habermas, the functions of social and system integration had already been performed by the state in the “pre-capitalist” stage of social evolution. For this reason the advanced capitalist state effectively “re-appropriates” a function lost to the market in the liberal stage.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p 36

production. Consequently, the state found itself confronted with the “problem of how socially produced wealth may be inequitably, and yet, legitimately distributed.”<sup>31</sup> Having to seek, under such a re-feudalisation with a smiling face, the validity claims required for the legitimization of unequal access to the means of production and uneven distribution of wealth, the state would be forced to seize control of the normative sphere of social life, thus prompting Habermas to argue that “[d]uring the course of capitalist development, the political system shifts its boundaries not only into the economic system but also into the socio-cultural system.”<sup>32</sup> Under a social system governed by the advanced capitalist state, then, actions oriented towards the emancipation of internal nature no longer address socio-cultural matters from the standpoint of intersubjective communication, but rather turn such matters into problems of “administrative manipulation.”<sup>33</sup> With a “public authority” now “compet[ing] for publicity,”<sup>34</sup> communication becomes distorted in such a way that the members of advanced capitalist societies “are no longer able to distinguish between practical and technical power,”<sup>35</sup> thereby paving the way for the suppression of “a critical public reflection still preoccupied with itself,”<sup>36</sup> and a corresponding *democratic deficit*.<sup>37</sup> It therefore follows that the realisation of the promises of modernity are presupposed by the capacity of individuals to engage in democratic processes assuming the form of public self-reflection which, Habermas contends, is itself dependent upon both their capacity to identify the distinction between communicative and instrumental rationality, and the institutionalisation of their *non-identity*.

### ***Restoring Communication Free From domination: Non-identity and the Public Sphere***

So far in this chapter, it has been shown that some of Habermas’s fundamental assumptions regarding both the prospects and conditions of human emancipation,

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p 20

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p 47

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p 47

<sup>34</sup> Habermas, J. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p 195

<sup>35</sup> Habermas, J. *Theory and Practice*, p 255

<sup>36</sup> Habermas, J. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p 29

<sup>37</sup> One could therefore suggest, here, that this problematic situation calls for a *social* form of mediation, i.e. a non-statist form of democracy. This case shall be made more extensively in the final two chapters of the present work.

contained the seeds of a break away from those underpinning Marx's critique of political economy and the critical theory of his Frankfurt School counterparts, and which his linguistic turn will later confirm and extend. Firstly, Habermas is a firm believer in modernity's capacity to deliver the democratic foundations required for the realisation of the self-reflexive potential of individuals. Secondly, his "functionally differentiated" approach to social evolution enabled him to differentiate between the logic of emancipation from external nature, and that of internal nature, thereby causing him to defend the possibility of a coexistence between a form of knowledge arising out of activities geared towards the domination of nature, and another emerging out of actions seeking to realise the self-reflexive potential of the human species.<sup>38</sup> Thirdly, and drawing on his previous assumption, he located the conditions of human emancipation outside the sphere of work, and predicated them upon the undistorted consummation of communicative reason. Lastly, it was suggested that, according to the second generation critical theorist, the realisation of the self-reflexive potential of humanity depended upon the implementation of institutions capable of securing the non-identity of instrumental and communicative reason. How, then, does Habermas propose to achieve such a state of affairs under an advanced (capitalist) stage of modernity characterised by the penetration of systemic imperatives into a sphere of activity originally concerned with the emancipation of internal nature?

Before exploring the nature of the challenge facing Habermas in his quest to solve the problem of distorted communication, one must first seek to comprehend the distinctive mechanisms involved in the exercise of communicative reason. Although no explicit account of this form of rationality can be found in his work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, it is through his qualified defence of this institution that the first glimpses of communicative reason can be identified. Here, Habermas had already hinted at a type of action and form of knowledge which he would further elaborate later in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, where he made the following observation:

This concept of *communicative rationality* carries with it connotations based ultimately on the central experience of the unconstrained, unifying, consensus-binding force of argumentative speech, in which different participants overcome their merely subjective views and, owing to the

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<sup>38</sup> Habermas, J. "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," in Calhoun, C. (ed) (1997) *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, London: Polity Press, p 436

mutuality of rationally motivated conviction, assure themselves of both the unity of the objective world and the intersubjectivity of their lifeworld.<sup>39</sup>

In the light of such an observation, the emphasis placed by Habermas on the role played by the public sphere in the exercise of communicative reason becomes fairly straightforward. As a public space of free argumentation serving “privatized individuals” in their quest for the “*peculiar* obviousness [emphasis added]” of the “criteria of *generality* and abstractness characterizing legal norms [emphasis added],” the public sphere performed a central function in unleashing the subversive force of communicative rationality.<sup>40</sup> It *also* allowed the members of the “public sphere in the world of letters” – where culture is made into “an object of critical debate”<sup>41</sup> – to channel the particularity of their experiences (needs, desires, feelings emotions and the like) as private individuals into the “rational-universal”<sup>42</sup> force of a public opinion formed through public deliberation, and converted into a public criticism of the established authority by the “political public sphere.” The subversive exercise of communicative reason, in this sense, involves the dual process of “universalistic justification of norms” and “democratic generalization of interests,” whose ultimate end is the self-regulated discovery of the “ethical life” framing social relations.<sup>43</sup> The form of interaction underpinning these processes, then, aims to reach beyond the confines of mere compromise.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, compromises begin with a conflict of at least two parties each seeking to maximise its own interest. The resolution of such a conflict must assume the form of a trade-off between the relevant interests. For this reason, compromises not only arise from the particularity of self-interested power relations, but also tend to remain within the normative space framed by these relations as “*generalised particularism* [emphasis added].”<sup>45</sup> Rational consensus, on the other hand, in virtue of its reliance on the impartiality of communicative reason and the “consensus-binding force of argumentative speech,” seeks to uncover the *general interest* and, as such, aims to transcend the normative boundaries erected by the subjectivity of the world of private individuals. The public sphere, in sum, serves as a platform for

<sup>39</sup> Habermas, J. (1984) *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. I. London : Polity Press, p 10

<sup>40</sup> Habermas, J. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p 54

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p 173

<sup>42</sup> Carl Schmitt cited in *ibid*, p 81

<sup>43</sup> McCarthy, T. “Practical Discourse : On the Relation of Morality to Politics,” in Calhoun, C. (ed) (1997) *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, London: Polity Press, p 64

<sup>44</sup> McCarthy, T. “Practical Discourse: On the Relation of Morality to Politics,” p 59

<sup>45</sup> Habermas, J. “Further Reflections on the Public Sphere,” p 445

individuals seeking to uncover the “ethical life” of society through the free exercise of communicative reason and, as such, constitutes the key institutional basis upon which the realisation of a pluralist “democratic universalism” can be made possible.<sup>46</sup>

However, Habermas’s work on the public sphere also sought to expose the structural limitations of this historically unique institution. Indeed, he observed that with the commercialisation of the press and the pluralisation of competitive interests that ensued, the process of formation of public opinion began to assume a different form. As conflicts of interest began to spread into the political public sphere, the power of private organisations and inequalities between various class interests became visible, thereby undermining the impartiality of public opinion, and forcing the state to seek “temporary compromises between groups” of private interests.<sup>47</sup> Thus, as Habermas pointed out:

In the same degree to which this kind of mutual penetration of state and civil society dissolved a private sphere whose independent existence made possible the generality of the laws, the foundation for a relatively homogenous public composed of private citizens engaged in rational-critical debate was also shaken. Competition between organized private interests invaded the public sphere. If the particular interests that as privatized interests were neutralized in the common denominator of class interest once permitted public discussion to attain a certain rationality and even effectiveness, it remains that today the display of competing interests has taken the place of such discussion. The consensus developed in rational-critical debate has yielded to compromise fought out or simply imposed nonpublicly.<sup>48</sup>

As institutionalised class compromise, the welfare state of advanced capitalist societies ultimately acts as a source of communicative distortion, where the latter is directly analogous to the way surplus value is appropriated. The state’s involvement in the resolution of conflicts of interests has effectively stifled civil society’s capacity to both regulate itself and subvert the established public authority, thereby removing the basic conditions required for the application of the “criteria of [communicative] rationality.”<sup>49</sup> The challenge facing Habermas can therefore be stated as follows: how can the neutralisation of private interests presupposing the rationally deliberated search for “ethical life” be immunised against the highly distorting tendencies of systemic imperatives under advanced capitalism?

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p 445

<sup>47</sup> Habermas, J. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p 199

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p 179

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p 195

Since in his early works, such as the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* and *Legitimation Crisis*, Habermas traced back the depoliticisation of the relations of production necessary for the neutralisation of private interests<sup>50</sup> and the exercise of “democratic universalism” to the formal separation of the state and the economy and, correspondingly, explained the suppression of communication in terms of a re-coupling of the two spheres under the latest stage of capitalist development, it would seem coherent to conclude that the non-identity of communicative and instrumental reason must be presupposed by a transformation of advanced capitalism’s institutions to be realised “*democratically from within* [emphasis added].”<sup>51</sup> However, Habermas’s strategy for the restoration of unconstrained communication has changed over the years. Whilst in his early works, the non-identity of the two forms of rationality still relied on the “parallelization of the action systems” of state and economy with the respective “action types” of instrumental and communicative action, from the *Theory of Communicative Action* onwards Habermas abandons such a configuration in favour of another that would be capable of giving recognition to the “different resources for societal integration” lying outside the state, whose functions are now thought to assume systemically integrative forms.<sup>52</sup> For this reason, the non-identity of instrumental and communicative action would now be secured by “erect[ing] a democratic dam against the colonializing encroachment of system imperatives on areas of the lifeworld.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, Habermas’s reconceptualisation of the state as a systemically integrative sphere *per se* has led him to substitute the pessimism regarding the prospects of unconstrained communication under a state accused of *appropriating* systemically integrative functions, with an optimism regarding the possibility of maximising the “forces of societal integration” for the protection of the lifeworld against imperatives now thought to be *specific* not only to the economy, but to the state as well.<sup>54</sup> The impact of such an alteration on his emancipatory strategy was made most explicit in the following passage:

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<sup>50</sup> It must be noted here that although private interests emerge with such de-politicisation, the de-coupling of state and civil society is, according to Habermas, thought to open up a public space making their neutralisation possible.

<sup>51</sup> Habermas, J. “Further Reflections on the Public Sphere,” pp 443-4

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p 443

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p 444. Whilst the state administration and the market constitute what Habermas called the system, the lifeworld cannot be so readily associated with institutions, and is thought to comprise forms of activity concerned with the wider and less tangible realm of cultural matters. Habermas’s most extensive account of the system/lifeworld distinction can be found in volume two of *The Theory of Communicative Action*.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p 444



The theory of communicative action intends to bring into the open the rational potential intrinsic in everyday communicative practices. [...] Such a task no longer restricts the search for normative potentials to a formation of the public sphere that was specific to a single epoch. It removes the necessity for stylizing particular prototypical manifestations of an institutionally embodied communicative rationality in favor of an empirical approach in which the tension of the abstract opposition between norm and reality is dissolved.<sup>55</sup>

Thus, instead of seeking to identify the conditions required for the argumentative discovery of the general interest outside the institutions of advanced capitalism, critical theory ought to embrace the more empirical and pragmatic stance of an approach seeking a “*radical-democratic change in the process of legitimation* [emphasis added].”<sup>56</sup> The task of immunising communicative rationality against the threat of systemic imperatives, therefore, no longer depends on a change of a strictly institutional form motivated by an idealised institutional arrangement of communicative practices, but on cultivating the “transhistorical capacity for human communication” within the basic contours offered by the current institutional framework.<sup>57</sup>

What led Habermas to adopt such a standpoint can be (at least partly) explained by his fatalistic concern with the fact that, as Thornhill put it, “the media of money and power have now established themselves instrumentally against their normative environments.”<sup>58</sup> Such an observation would eventually lead him to conduct a more detailed analysis of communicative practices, the implications of which effectively informed the development of his thought.<sup>59</sup> Thus, having established in *The Theory of Communicative Action* that the “normative content of democracy” is realised through wide-ranging practices of “discursive public communications” and discovered in truths universally implicit in all speech, Habermas could not restrict the scope of his democratic procedures to the *legal* domain, but also had to consider the existence of a “spontaneous *flow* of communication unsubverted by power [emphasis added]” effectively escaping the grasp of formal institutionalisation.<sup>60</sup> The task of securing the non-identity of communicative and instrumental reason, therefore, “is based on the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, pp 442-3

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p 444

<sup>57</sup> Calhoun, C. “Introduction : Habermas and the Public Sphere,” in Calhoun, C. (ed) (1997) *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, London: Polity Press, p 31.

<sup>58</sup> Thornhill, C. (2000) *Political Theory in Modern Germany*, Cambridge: Polity Press, p 165

<sup>59</sup> It is in *The Theory of Communicative Action* that Habermas first explored such practices in details.

<sup>60</sup> Habermas, J. “Further Reflections on the Public Sphere,” p 451

interplay between a constitutionally instituted formation of the political will” and the “*nonorganized*” socially integrative resources.<sup>61</sup> For this reason, it could be argued that although instances of practical discourse do fall outside “formally instituted processes of communication and decision-making,” Habermas never fully abandoned his concern for institutional changes but, instead, altered them in such a way as to direct social criticism *primarily* towards the realisation of transhistorical communicative potentials through the maximisation of resources made available by modernity<sup>62</sup> Drawing on such a line of thought, it could be further argued that, since the discursive discovery of both ethical life and the resolution of problems of a practical nature no longer depend on the *prioritised* implementation of *fundamental* institutional changes, but rather on the introduction of structures of communication requiring *minor* institutional adjustments,<sup>63</sup> Habermas has, from *The Theory of Communicative Action* onwards, “bid a [definitive] farewell to the notion of alienation and appropriation of objectified essentialist powers,” whose accomplishment was motivated by the emancipatory drive for *self-realisation* pushing humanity beyond the boundaries imposed by the existing historical conditions and causing it to necessitate a radical transformation of the wider social reality.<sup>64</sup>

Habermas’s confinement of human emancipation to the sphere of interaction, his later abandonment of the philosophy of consciousness,<sup>65</sup> and the reformulation of social criticism into a theory of communicative action seeking the non-identity of communicative instrumental reason as an empirical legitimation of power rather than a structural transformation of the state and the economy, all point towards a repositioning of critical social theory from the *radical* transformation implicit in *self-realisation* to a *conciliatory* defence of *intersubjective self-reflection* somewhat reminiscent of the subjectivist trajectories followed by Kant and Hegel in their approach to autonomy,<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p 451

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p 541

<sup>63</sup> In his work entitled *Between Facts and Norms*, Habermas even went as far as arguing that “despite [...] structural disadvantages [...], at the critical moments of an accelerated history, [...] actors get the chance to *reverse* the normal circuits of communication in the political system and the public sphere.” Thus, the possibility of restoring undistorted communication is no longer thought to rest on the participation in a *yet-to-be-implemented* public sphere, but on the realisation of *already available* communicative potentials. Habermas, J. (1996) *Between Facts and Norms*, Cambridge: Polity Press, p 381

<sup>64</sup> Habermas, J. “Further Reflections on the Public Sphere,” p 452

<sup>65</sup> Although Habermas clearly differentiated his own critical theory from the philosophy of consciousness very early on – through his critique of Marx’s historical materialism – the use of the categories “work” and “interaction” was effectively inspired by such a philosophy.

<sup>66</sup> The distinction between the two philosophers’ approaches to autonomy was explored in chapter one. The similarity denoted by the present observation, however, ought be understood from the standpoint of Marx’s own critique of idealist philosophy, namely the fact that for both Kant and Hegel, the prospects of

thereby striking the final blows against the transformative radicalism of critical theory<sup>67</sup> – blows that constitute a fundamental problem as soon as the possibility of “fair negotiations and free debates” under material conditions organised around the division of labour, is called into question.<sup>68</sup>

### *On the Material Origins of Reflexivity*

The basic contours of the practical content of Habermas’s critical social theory have so far been kept somewhat implicit. It should nevertheless be clear, at this point, that the distinction between the spheres of work and interaction ensuing from his reconstruction of historical materialism has led him to distance himself from, and even reject, a fundamental tenet of the philosophy of consciousness according to which human emancipation ought to assume a form no less radical than that of self-realisation. Since he presented the repressive character of advanced capitalism as a problem caused by the subsumption of the logic of emancipation of internal nature under the logic of the emancipation from external nature, and explained it as the consequence of a state increasingly present in the resolution of cultural matters, Habermas sought the solution to the problem of human emancipation in the radical democratisation of legitimisation processes thought to be dependent on the social actors’ capacity to distinguish between practical and technical interests. From this moment on, the practical content of critical theory would consist in serving the enlightenment of individuals in such a way as to raise their consciousness of the distinction between actions oriented towards self-

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autonomy do not rest on a transformation of the objective reality, but is instead confined to the subjectivist realm of the categorical imperative and the negation of the negation respectively.

<sup>67</sup> I am not alone in making such a claim. Scheuerman and Bohman, for example, have highlighted a conservative shift in Habermas’s theory, particularly from *Between Facts and Norms* onwards. See Scheuerman, W.E. “Between Radicalism and Resignation : Democratic Theory in Habermas’s *Between Facts and Norms*,” in Dews, P. (1999) *Habermas : A Critical Reader*, Oxford : Blackwell, and Bohman, J. “Complexity, Pluralism, and the Constitutional State : On Habermas’s *Faktizität und Geltung*” *Law & Society Review*, Vol. 28, No. 4, 1994. Such claims have nevertheless been contradicted by Grodnick, who identified in *Between Facts and Norms*, a clear attempt to “make radical democracy compatible with a political system that resembles our own.” Grodnick, S. “Rediscovering Radical Democracy in Habermas’s *Between Facts and Norms*,” *Constellations*, Vol 12, No. 3, 2005. I shall nevertheless contend that, on the one hand, the abstractness of Habermas’s own democratic theory poses a significant problem for its practical realisation and that, on the other hand, the prospects for radical democracy depend on the development of new, non-manipulative, subject-object relations (see below). Furthermore, even when Habermas approaches the problem of equal participation from the standpoint of economic redistribution, he fails to reflect on the compatibility (or lack thereof) of such a redistribution with the fundamental imperatives of capitalist material reproduction.

<sup>68</sup> Habermas, J. “Further Reflections on the Public Sphere,” p 449

reflection and those oriented towards manipulation and control, and maintain the non-identity of the two forms of actions thought to be the precondition for the exercise of a pluralist democratic universalism. With Habermas, then, one witnesses a re-connection of the project of human emancipation with the Enlightenment concept of autonomy, according to which the transformation of the conditions required for self-reflexivity ought to assume a primarily subjective form. The central issue at hand, then, is whether critical social theory can realistically serve the interests of human emancipation without an immediate and direct defence of a radical transformation of the material conditions of existence.

Habermas's reasons for distancing himself from the form of human emancipation defended by Marx<sup>69</sup> are clear and numerous and were discussed in the first section of the present chapter. In order to address the aforementioned issue, it is nevertheless worth reiterating here the crux of Habermas's critique of Marx's historical materialist stance, namely the so-called "*reduction*" of "the process of self-reflection to the level of instrumental reason:"<sup>70</sup>

Alongside the forces of production in which instrumental action is sedimented, Marx's social theory also incorporates into its approach the institutional framework, the relations of production. It does not eliminate from practice the structure of symbolic interaction and the role of cultural traditions, which are the only basis on which power (*Herrschaft*) and ideology can be comprehended. But this aspect of practice is not made part of the philosophical frame of reference. It is in this very dimension, however, which does not coincide with that of instrumental action, that phenomenological experience moves.<sup>71</sup>

According to Habermas, then, the form of experience whereby individuals are said to be capable of reflecting upon the conditions of their existence – known as phenomenological experience – and begin a "world-transforming accumulation of knowledge," lies outside the sphere of material reproduction.<sup>72</sup> Thus, according to Habermas's own schema, one finds, on the one hand, the forces of production which, in virtue of direct involvement in the transformation of nature (as instruments and products of labour), are thought to release a form of knowledge of a strictly "technically

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<sup>69</sup> It is worth mentioning here that Habermas is equally concerned with refuting Adorno's own approach to emancipation. The last chapter of volume one of *The Theory of Communicative Action* comprises the most explicit statement of such a refutation.

<sup>70</sup> Habermas, J. *Knowledge and Human Interests*, p 44

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, p 42

<sup>72</sup> Habermas, J. (1987) *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press, p 335

exploitable” form.<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, one finds the relations of production, which as the field of the social organisation of labour and the site of the “struggle for recognition,” are thought to concern a (normative) form of experience and knowledge both falling outside the scope delimited by the strategic relationship between humanity and external nature, and maximising the socially integrative resources required for the formation of socio-political institutions.<sup>74</sup> Consequently, the prospects of human emancipation cannot be said to rest primarily on the development of the productive forces.

However, the criticisms that have led Habermas to reconstruct historical materialism in such a way as to accommodate the two logics of emancipation are founded upon a somewhat reductionist, albeit conventional, interpretation of Marx’s concept of labour. According to Habermas, a central problem with Marx’s social theory is the fact that, by locating the problem of human emancipation within the framework of the “synthesis of man and [external] nature,”<sup>75</sup> the latter was incapable of incorporating non-instrumental forms of knowledge within the scope of his “philosophical frame of reference.” However, as was shown in the first chapter of this thesis, such an interpretation fails to do justice to the breadth of Marx’s approach to the relationship between humanity and nature. Indeed, whilst it is possible to identify, in his works, explicit references to a conception of labour as a sphere of activity governed by the instrumental and strategic orientations manifesting themselves in humanity’s attempts to master the forces of external nature, a less explicit but fairly consistently defended thesis whereby external nature is treated as a *partner* in emancipation can also be found. The scope of social practice through labour, in the latter case, is no longer reduced to actions governed by what Habermas called “systemic imperatives,” but is now extended to include actions geared towards “mutual understanding.” Already with Marx, then, is it possible to catch glimpses of the reconciliation of humanity and nature later defended by the first generation of Frankfurt School theorists such as Adorno and Marcuse.<sup>76</sup> Although Habermas failed to appreciate the existence of such a stance in Marx’s works,

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<sup>73</sup> Habermas, J. “The New Obscurity: The crisis of the Welfare State and the Exhaustion of Utopian Energies,” *Philosophy and Criticism*, Vol. 11, No. 1, January 1986, p 16

<sup>74</sup> As was shown above, however, Habermas has given some credit to Marx’s interpretative schema with regards to the critique of the liberal stage of capitalist development, which he believed to be characterised by a depoliticisation of the relations of production.

<sup>75</sup> Habermas, J. *Knowledge and Human Interests*, p 30-1

<sup>76</sup> See chapters two and three for a more detailed account of Adorno’s and Marcuse’s stance on the reconciliation of humanity and nature.

he made his position on the aforementioned reconciliation known in his assessment of Marcuse's suggested solution to the problem of "technological domination:"

Instead of treating nature as the object of possible technical control, we can encounter her as the opposing partner in a possible interaction. We can seek out a fraternal rather than an exploited nature. At the level of an as yet incomplete intersubjectivity we can impute subjectivity to animals and plants, even to minerals, and try to communicate with nature instead of merely processing her under conditions of severed communication. And the idea that a still enchained subjectivity of nature cannot be unbound until men's communication among themselves is free from domination has retained, to say the least, a singular attraction.<sup>77</sup>

The somewhat satiristic and dismissive style of the above passage reveals Habermas's doubts regarding the possibility of transforming nature in such a way as to treat it as a "partner" in emancipation. This doubtful attitude towards reconciliation stems from the view that the relationship between humanity and external nature involved in "[t]echnological development [...] follows a logic that corresponds to the structure of purposive-rational action."<sup>78</sup> Thus, "as long [...] as we have to achieve self-preservation through social labour [...] we could not renounce technology, more particularly our technology, in favor of a qualitatively different one."<sup>79</sup> Implicit in such an assertion, then, is the assumption that the imperatives of efficiency and productivity apply to all processes of transformation of external nature, independently of the form assumed by the social organisation of production. It therefore follows that such imperatives "cannot [...] be themselves conceived as values," and that, in turn, the origins of the normative role played by technology in political domination under the rule of the "technocratic consciousness" cannot be traced back to the relationship between humanity and external nature.<sup>80</sup> Habermas justifies such assertions on the basis of the distinction between the relations of production and the forces of production as a distinction between a normative sphere of action and a value-neutral sphere of action. However, it becomes difficult to maintain the distinction, and therefore defend the value neutrality of the economic foundation of society, as soon as the role played by the social organisation of labour in technological development is re-assessed.

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<sup>77</sup> Habermas, J. "Technology and Science as Ideology," in Habermas, J. (1971) *Toward a Rational Society: Student Protest, Science and Politics*, London: Heinemann, p 88

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p 87. Arendt's and Heidegger's shared concerns with the necessarily instrumental character of technology have clearly influenced Habermas here.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p 87

<sup>80</sup> Habermas, J. *Theory and Practice*, p 269

As the previous points revealed, the historical materialist approach attributed to Marx by Habermas locates the “stored up forces of production” at the centre of social evolution.<sup>81</sup> Their development, Habermas argued, ought to be interpreted as the key driving force identified by Marx behind the transformation of “the world within which subjects relate to their objects.”<sup>82</sup> Although fairly conventional among both Marxist and non-Marxist scholars,<sup>83</sup> this interpretation of Marx’s materialism fails to fully appreciate the complexity of the dynamics of social structure identified by the latter. As Poulantzas put it:

it is the primacy of the relations of production over the productive forces that gives to their articulation the form of a process of production and reproduction. The productive forces do indeed have materiality of their own that can by no means be ignored; *but they are always organized under given relations of production*. Thus, while the two may enter into contradiction with each other and undergo forms of uneven development, they always do so within a process that stems from the primacy of the relations of production. [emphasis added].<sup>84</sup>

According to the above passage, then, the materiality of society cannot be reduced to the forces of production. In fact, we now discover that an accurate understanding of Marx’s materialist stance ought to place a strong emphasis upon the fundamental role played by the organisation of production, i.e. division of labour, property, law, legitimacy, into a class of owners of the means of production imposing its productivist regime onto a class of dispossessed workers, in both the development of the productive forces and society at large.<sup>85</sup> After all, it was Marx who first raised concerns regarding the *direct and causal* relation between the capitalist division of labour<sup>86</sup> and both the unprecedented pace of development of the productive forces and the conditions

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<sup>81</sup> Habermas, J. *Knowledge and Human Interests*, p 29

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p 29

<sup>83</sup> The term “materialism” is often associated with the (material) products of labour, i.e. technology.

<sup>84</sup> Poulantzas, N. (1978) *State, Power, Socialism*, London: NLB, p 26

<sup>85</sup> The annual summits held in Davos by government officials, entrepreneurs and “other leaders of society,” all joining their efforts in order to find ways in which growth and efficiency can be maximised and legitimated, serve to illustrate the dependence of the development of productive forces upon relations of production. The political implications of the “primacy of the relations of production” in the material base of society will be further discussed below.

<sup>86</sup> The division of labour does indeed underpin Marx’s conception of the relations of production : “the existing stage in the division of labour determines also the relations of individuals to one another with reference to the material, instrument, and product of labour.” Marx, K. “The German Ideology,” in McLellan, D. (ed) (2000) *Karl Marx : Selected Writings*, Oxford : Oxford University Press, p 177-8

of existence (exploitation and alienation) that characterise bourgeois societies.<sup>87</sup> Whereas such a clarification may, at first glance, appear to consist in a merely academic exercise, its implications effectively call into question Habermas's distinction between the normative sphere of interaction from its non-normative counterpart, namely work. Indeed, by re-assessing the role played by the organisation of production in the development of the productive forces and society at large, one also becomes capable of fully appreciating the epistemological status of the so-called "systemic imperatives" (efficiency and productivity) which, as orientations traced back to the emergence of the capitalist division of labour, can no longer be treated as components of a knowledge-constitutive interest of a merely technical kind but, rather, as ones stemming from the sphere of interaction itself. Efficiency and productivity not only inform the technical appropriation of the materials of nature, but are also infused with a cultural force informing the value-judgements of individuals communicating with each other and their internal nature, whilst transforming external nature. The truth content of validity claims is therefore assessed according to the normative yardstick framed by the imperatives of efficiency and productivity, whatever stage within the development of capitalism one seeks to address. The cultural manifestation of what Marcuse called "technological domination" cannot, in this sense, be explained in terms of a *subsumption* of a logic of interaction under a formally distinct logic of technical control resulting from the supersession of the separation between the state and the economy, but must *directly* be traced back to a sphere of material reproduction organised around the division of labour.<sup>88</sup> Thus, since "there is no [value-]neutral notion of efficiency and productivity" and, therefore, *no value-neutral material reproduction*, it is possible to argue that Habermas's distinction between a form of knowledge thought to emanate from the transformation of external nature, and another from the interaction between humanity

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<sup>87</sup> It is as "a form of existence of capital," and therefore in virtue of its central role in processes of wealth accumulation, that the division of labour effectively underpins the technological achievements – and the problems resulting therefrom – of the industrial age. Marx, K. "Capital," in McLellan, D. *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, p 514

<sup>88</sup> The direct role played by the capitalist division of labour in processes of domination was also identified by Stockman who argued that "[s]cientific knowledge of laws of nature, conceived of as being or depending on empirical regularities and therefore transformable into technically applicable knowledge [...], is generated by and then helps to sustain a form of the division of labour which is simultaneously a structure of domination." Stockman, N. "Habermas, Marcuse and the *Aufhebung* of Science and Technology," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 1978, No 8, p 31



and its internal nature, cannot be upheld.<sup>89</sup> How, then, can the problem of emancipation be re-assessed in the light of such observations?

Having exposed the *necessary* involvement of normative orientations in the economic base of society, one can begin to fully grasp the material origins of the repressive social, political and epistemological character of the capitalist mode of production and, consequently, identify the fundamental problem with Habermas's own diagnosis. As an activity whereby individuals transform nature in such a way as to satisfy their own needs, performed with the conscious knowledge of satisfying another person's needs, and requiring them to cooperate with other members of society, labour could not only be said to *mediate* humanity and external nature but also humanity with itself.<sup>90</sup> If one were to agree with Habermas's approach, however, one would have to claim that attributing such functions to labour would mean reducing reflection to framework of instrumental reason, thereby subsuming all forms of interaction to the logic of technical control. However, as was mentioned above, what Habermas fails to appreciate is the central role performed by the relations of production in the transformation of external nature.<sup>91</sup> Such a failure has indeed led him to overlook the fact that the actual problem does not effectively lie in attributing such a dualistic function to labour, but derives from the manner in which labour itself is *organised*. As Eyerman and Shipway pointed:

While it is true that the human need to transform nature requires that people turn themselves into instruments, and leads them to act purposively as objects rather than communicatively as subjects, this is only *one* dimension of the labor process. To this dimension must be added another, reflected in the use of imagination and creativity which precedes, terminates, and

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<sup>89</sup> Eyerman, R. and Shipway, D. "Habermas on Work and Culture," *Theory and Society*, Vol. 10, No. 4 July 1981, p 563. This view echoes Cannon's own critique of Habermas's distinction of system and lifeworld, according to which the latter "fails to appreciate the degree to which workers are embedded in a rich and complex network of normative relationships that mediate between the world of work and the system imperatives that regulate it." Cannon, B. (2001) *Rethinking the Normative Content of Critical Theory: Marx, Habermas and Beyond*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, p 126. The normative character of subject-object relations is also given recognition in Steven Vogel work entitled *Against Nature: The Concept of Nature in Critical Theory* (1996), where he sought to present nature as a social category.

<sup>90</sup> Central to the present work is the attempt to show that the labour-mediated relationship between humanity and nature can be achieved without a re-coupling of state and civil society. Such an issue will be addressed more extensively in the last two chapters.

<sup>91</sup> Such a view echoes Negri's re-interpretation of Marx's *Grundrisse* in *Marx Beyond Marx*. Here, Negri's call for a political reading of Marx's analysis is partly supported by revealing the political character of the extraction of surplus value in the political economist's work.

*weaves its way throughout* the instrumental dimension of the labor process. Work is, in other words, *simultaneously* cultural and technical activity, and is never purely instrumental [...]<sup>92</sup>

Addressing the shortcomings of Habermas's diagnosis, then, involves connecting the rise of instrumental reason with the historical emergence of the division of labour, thereby recognising both the historically specific character of the imperatives of efficiency and productivity – whose existence stifles the possibility of a reflexive engagement in labour – and the possibility of re-organising labour in such a way as to maximise the “use of imagination and creativity” in work, whilst re-configuring inner-external nature relations. The central problem with the capitalist mode of production, therefore, revolves around the fact that the form assumed by its relations of production has caused the purposeful transformation of external nature to yield a strictly instrumental form of knowledge. As such, by stifling creativity, the separation of mental and manual labour prevents the powerless worker from “*interpret[ing]* the implications of the technical demands placed upon him,”<sup>93</sup> thereby also denying him the capacity to engage in labour in such a way as to make the purposeful and cooperative satisfaction of another person's needs a goal to be achieved simultaneously to the satisfaction of his own needs.<sup>94</sup> It could therefore be suggested that Habermas's decision to exclude a radical transformation of the material conditions of existence from the practical scope of critical social theory, stems from a problematic stance “tak[ing] absolutely for granted what is but a tendency under the capitalist mode of production.”<sup>95</sup> Such a “conceptual ‘blindness’ [...] places Habermas behind the thinking of Marx himself” who, by defending human emancipation as self-realisation in labour,<sup>96</sup> was able to grasp the fact that “the instrumentality of labor was a direct by-product of human social organization and *interaction*” and therefore not, as Habermas contended, a condition that can be “absolutized for *all* historical periods and for all social formations.”<sup>97</sup> Let's now turn to the political implications of the aforementioned observations.

Although Habermas undertook a major reconstruction of historical materialism, he had credited Marx's base/superstructure schema with being capable of grasping the

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, p 558

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, p 562

<sup>94</sup> It could be further suggested that the distinction between an organisation of production yielding strictly instrumental forms of knowledge, and another capable of also yielding reflexive knowledge, corresponds to Marx's distinction between “alienated labour” and “human production.”

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, p 559

<sup>96</sup> For a more detailed account of Marx's concept of labour as self-realisation see chapter one.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, p 559

material character of the “steering mechanism” of society and the economic form assumed by the relations of production under the liberal stage of capitalism.<sup>98</sup> As soon as the state begins to play an active role in material reproduction and the relations of production (re-)assume a political character, Habermas contends, the feasibility of Marx’s schema is immediately called into question, for it is the so-called superstructure that is now said to perform the function of “steering mechanism.” According to Habermas, the repoliticisation of the relations of production taking place under the advanced stage of capitalist development constitutes a key development in the processes of legitimation of the laws governing capitalist societies. Correspondingly, such a development marked the demise of a rational *consensus* establishing the truth content of the validity claims of a) free and equal citizens who have made their private interest public and b) those embodied in the laws, in favour of structures of legitimation assuming the form of a political *compromise* between conflicting economic interests. According to Habermas, then, the conflict between labour and capital begins to enter legitimation processes and undermine the *deliberative* – and therefore democratic – character of debates only once the state begins to intervene in the economy and resolves their opposition into an *imposed* political compromise failing to reconcile the individual and the collective, also known as the welfare compromise. However, as one of the prominent marxist figures seeking to reveal the embeddedness of structures of legitimation in material reproduction – Nicos Poulantzas – pointed out, the politicisation of the relations of production, which Habermas identified as a phenomenon specific to traditional societies and the advanced stage of capitalism, is in fact one also found in the earlier stage of the latter mode of production. This can, once again, be explained by addressing the implications of the primary function performed by the relations of production in society:

Form this primacy flows the presence of political (ideological) relations within the relations of production: the latter, like their constituent relation of possession and economic property, find expression in class powers that are organically articulated to the political and ideological relations which concretize and legitimize them. These relations neither represent simple additions to already existing relations of production, nor do they merely react upon them in the mode of absolute exteriority or temporal sequence. They are themselves present in the constitution of the relations of production, in ways that vary with each mode of production. We should therefore rid ourselves of the now widespread idea that political (and ideological)

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<sup>98</sup> See the first section of this chapter.

relations enter only into the reproduction of the relations of production, which for their part retain all the original purity of self-generation. It is precisely because political-ideological relations are already present in the actual constitution of the relations of production that they play such an essential role in their reproduction; that is also why the process of production and exploitation involves reproduction of the relations of political-ideological domination and subordination.<sup>99</sup>

Thus, since “[t]he *Political field of the State* (as well as the sphere of ideology) *has always, in different forms, been present in the constitution and reproduction of the relations of production*”<sup>100</sup> – relations that play a key role in the material foundation of society – it is possible to suggest that the rational universality ensuing from the debates in the public sphere was in fact illusory. Whilst Habermas himself had raised concerns regarding the bourgeois public sphere,<sup>101</sup> he maintained that the “bracketing of social inequality” constituted a sufficient condition for the relevant “interlocutors” to be able to “deliberate as peers,” thereby overlooking the political character of the “relations of dominance and subordination” under liberal capitalism.<sup>102</sup> Thus, we discover that as the “political-ideological” basis of the division of labour, the “relation of possession and economic property” performs a distorting function in *all* stages of capitalist development. This, in turn, calls into question Habermas’s overall position, namely the possibility of radically democratising the legitimisation structures of capitalist societies whilst leaving the material conditions untouched.

### *Concluding remarks*

In the Postscript of his essay entitled “Traditional and Critical Theory,” Horkheimer warned that since “the economy is the first cause of wretchedness, [...] critique, theoretical and practical, must address itself primarily to it.”<sup>103</sup> However, by conceiving of modernity as an age unleashing the normative-emancipatory power of communicative rationality *alongside* the manipulative-emancipatory power of

<sup>99</sup> Poulantzas, N. *State, Power, Socialism*, pp 26-7

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, p 17

<sup>101</sup> Most of these concerns revolved around what Habermas understood as the “conflation of bourgeois and *homme*” in the citizen, which are thought to have made the public sphere vulnerable to conflicts of interests.

<sup>102</sup> Fraser, N. “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in Calhoun, C. (ed) (1997) *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge: Polity, p 121

<sup>103</sup> Horkheimer, M. “Traditional and Critical Theory,” p 249

instrumental rationality whilst *simultaneously* distorting the development of the former, Habermas has *repositioned* critical theory in such a way as to direct both its theoretical and practical force at the radical democratisation of structures of legitimation lying outside the economic sphere. Such a repositioning, which was undertaken on the basis of a *reductionist* conception of labour, marked the demise of the transformative potential of criticism unleashed by the critical theory of Marcuse. Indeed, whilst his investigations into the institutional arrangement capable of actualising emancipatory practice have represented a forward step towards meeting the expectations of the principle of negativity underpinning critical theory, the location of alternative conditions of existence within structures of legitimation lying outside the material conditions of existence has effectively caused the practical content of Habermas's social theory to fall behind not only Marcuse's, but Marx's too. Should a form of social criticism aiming to find the conditions required for human emancipation nevertheless seek to institutionalise the communicative form of rationality defended by Habermas, or should it abandon such a project in favour of a more suitable one?<sup>104</sup> The next chapter shall attempt to answer this question.

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<sup>104</sup> Although it should by now be clear that any attempt to undertake such a task ought to address the material conditions of existence, the suitability of communicative reason as a basis for an emancipatory form of knowledge still remains to be assessed.

## **Chapter 5**

### Human Emancipation and Communication

Whilst the previous chapter sought to identify the problems associated with Habermas's attempt to distinguish the contradictory axes of modern differentiation, the task here shall consist in establishing whether his theory of communicative action can provide a suitable basis for the conceptualisation of communicative practices oriented towards human emancipation. More specifically, it shall seek to find out whether Habermas's rejection of the critique of instrumental reason is adequately justified, and whether communicative rationality itself can be expected to succeed in achieving the goal of reconciliation.

#### ***The “Critique of Instrumental Reason” vs. the “Theory of Communicative Action”***

Several of Habermas's early works served as an attempt to defend the elaboration of a theory of knowledge that would not only complement Marx's critique of political economy, but also prompt significant revisions of some of its central tenets.<sup>1</sup> Marx, Habermas argued, had failed to explore the epistemological implications of repression. Such a view, however, had already been expressed by Adorno and Horkheimer who, also unsatisfied with Marx's economic reductionism, had developed their own theory of knowledge, known as the “critique of instrumental reason.” One is therefore justified in wondering why, a few decades after the first generation of critical theorists, Habermas chose to revive the claim for the elaboration of a theory of knowledge, thereby calling into question the relevance of the critical theory of his predecessors. The following passage provides an overview of Habermas's motivations:

I want to maintain that the program of early critical theory foundered [...] from the exhaustion of the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness. I shall argue that a change of paradigm to the theory of communication makes it possible to return to the undertaking that was interrupted with

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<sup>1</sup> See chapter four for a detailed exposition of such an attempt.

the critique of instrumental reason; and this will permit us to take once again the since neglected tasks of a critical theory of society.<sup>2</sup>

The previous generation has apparently failed to realise the very goal it had set for itself, namely identifying the conditions capable of yielding the reconciliation of humanity and nature. The reason for such a failure, Habermas contended, can be found in the critique of instrumental reason's incapacity to give recognition to the forms of action required for reconciliation. Like Marx, the first generation theorists were found guilty of turning the emancipation of humanity into a problem inextricably linked with the relationship between humanity and external nature. Indeed, whilst Adorno's and Horkheimer's critical theory succeeded in overcoming some of the limitations resulting from the epistemological deficit of Marx's critique, the reduction of their theory of knowledge to the framework of actions oriented towards success, i.e. instrumental action, led them to ignore the distinctively *human* and *communicative* basis upon which *reconciliation* can be realised. Habermas, then, claimed the task of critical theory to be realisable only by elaborating a theory of knowledge both capable of recognising the existence of actions oriented towards *mutual understanding*, and aiming to maximise the pursuit of such communicative practices. The possibility of recognising the forms of action corresponding to reconciliation must nevertheless be presupposed, as Habermas emphasised above, by the abandonment of the "paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness" thought to be the central cause of Adorno and Horkheimer's failure to step outside the framework of instrumental action.<sup>3</sup> What, then, prevents the philosophy of consciousness from fulfilling its promises?

As Habermas noted in the above passage, the causes of the critique of instrumental reason's limitations ought to be attributed to the restrictive scope of the philosophy of consciousness.<sup>4</sup> Since the problem of the emancipation of humanity is undifferentiated from the relationship between humanity and external nature, such an approach can only be expected to "understand [...] the capacities to relate oneself to

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<sup>2</sup> Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. I, p 386

<sup>3</sup> Habermas's self-proclaimed success in stepping outside of the framework of the philosophy of consciousness was contested by Bernstein. See J.M. Bernstein (1995) *Recovering Ethical Life*, London: Routledge, p 140. Whether Habermas did indeed succeed in doing so, however, falls outside the scope of the present chapter. My main concern here is to find out the reasons why the second generation critical theorist insisted on elaborating a theory of communication, and whether such a re-positioning of critical theory is worth pursuing.

<sup>4</sup> Such a philosophy is also known as the philosophy of the subject. Both formulations are used interchangeably by Habermas.

[...] entities in the world in an objectivating attitude and to gain control of objects, be it theoretically or practically.”<sup>5</sup> For this reason, Habermas argued that it is not only incapable of distinguishing between actions oriented towards success and those oriented towards mutual understanding, but also effectively reduces all actions to matters of manipulation. With such a narrow understanding of the scope of human action, Habermas concluded, the earlier generation of critical theorists was eventually prevented from stepping outside the framework of action it initially sought to suppress:

The societal subject behaves in relation to nature just as the individual subject does in relation to objects: Nature is objectivated and dominated for the sake of reproducing the life of society. The resistance of the law-governed nexus of nature, on which the subject toils in knowing and acting, thereby continues in the formation of society and of its individual members.<sup>6</sup>

A framework delimited by *subject-object* relations, according to Habermas, causes individuals to treat each other as manipulative objects and, consequently, cannot provide a basis for reconciliation. What the philosophies framed by the latter relations – such as Adorno’s “primacy of the object” – have apparently failed to grasp, is the specifically human character of the logic of action required for reconciliation. One cannot expect nature to voice its arguments, or expect humanity to treat this “other,” incapable of argumentation, as a *mutual* partner in emancipation. The absence of the preconditions required for mutual understanding within the relationship between humanity and nature led Habermas to conclude that the subject will never succeed in treating the object in non-manipulative ways. The conditions for reconciliation, then, ought to be located in a framework in which individuals communicate with each other as *humans qua humans*. One must, in other words, raise humanity out of the relations framed by its relationship with external nature; a task which he proposes to undertake by exploring a logic of action mediated by a distinctively human attribute, namely language.<sup>7</sup> Since, as Habermas insisted, “[r]eaching understanding is the inherent telos of human speech,” language is thought to be the medium of reconciliation *par excellence*.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, in order to be expected to yield the conditions for the

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<sup>5</sup> Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. I, p 385

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p 389

<sup>7</sup> Habermas’s position on the distinctively human character of language was most clearly expressed as follows : “What raises us out of nature is the only thing whose nature we can know.” Habermas, J. *Knowledge and Human Interests*, p 314

<sup>8</sup> Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, p 287



emancipation of internal nature, critical theory must abandon any “philosophy that withdraws behind the lines of discursive thought to the ‘mindfulness of nature’” in favour of an approach focusing on the strictly human and consensual character of *intersubjective* relations, namely the “theory of communicative action.”<sup>9</sup> This somewhat insidious dismissal of Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse as romantics marks Habermas’s more explicit attempt to break with the critique of instrumental reason of his predecessors.

Such a re-positioning of critical theory towards a theory of communicative action would, Habermas further argued, not only serve to capture the logic of action specific to reconciliation but also give recognition to the emancipatory potential of the later period of modernity. Although the advanced stage of capitalist development marks the advent of money as a “medium [...] replac[ing] understanding in language as a mechanism for coordinating action,” it is also characterised by the spread of “mass media of communication” that “technically amplify communication, bridge over spatial and temporal distances, multiply possibilities of communication and intensify the network of communicative action.”<sup>10</sup> According to Habermas, the strength of the theory of communication lies in its capacity to grasp both the distorting and positive achievements of modernity; it can serve both a critical-theoretical purpose and an emancipatory-practical one. The incapacity of the critique of instrumental reason to step outside the framework of subject-object relations and appreciate the achievements obtained at the level of intersubjective relations, meant that Adorno and Horkheimer could not be in a position to reach beyond the confines of critique.

The aforementioned first generation critical theorists did nevertheless attempt to conceptualise a form of mediation that would strip the subject-object relations of their manipulative character. Their concept of mediation, however, does not rely on language but “mimesis.” Here is how Habermas approached it:

The critique of instrumental reason, which remains bound to the conditions of the philosophy of the subject, denounces as a defect something that it cannot explain in its defectiveness because it lacks a conceptual framework sufficiently flexible to capture the integrity of what is destroyed through instrumental reason. To be sure, Horkheimer and Adorno do have a name for it: *mimesis*. And even though they cannot provide a theory of mimesis, the very name calls forth associations – and they are intended: Imitation designates a relation between persons in which

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p 385

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p 371-2

the one accommodates to the other, identifies with the other, empathizes with the other. There is an illusion here to a relation in which the surrender of the one to the example of the other does not mean a loss of self but a gain and an enrichment. Because the mimetic capacity escapes the conceptual framework of cognitive-instrumentally determined subject-object relations, it counts as the sheer opposite of reason, as impulse. Adorno does not simply deny to the latter any cognitive function. In his aesthetics he attempts to show what the work of art owes to the power of mimesis to unlock, open up. But the rational core of mimetic achievements can be laid open only if we give up the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness – namely, a subject that represents objects and toils with them – in favor of the paradigm of linguistic philosophy – namely, that of intersubjective understanding or communication – and puts the cognitive-instrumental aspect of reason in its proper place as part of a more encompassing *communicative rationality*.<sup>11</sup>

According to Habermas, then, the very process of mimesis, i.e. the act of imitating nature through a non-instrumental form of reason, requires a communicative framework of action. Indeed, since Habermas understood rationality as “a disposition of speaking and acting subjects that is expressed in modes of behaviour for which there are good reasons or grounds,” and interprets “imitation” as a process whereby one party necessarily seeks to accommodate the interests of another party through identification and empathy, he was forced to conclude that mimetic achievements could only be attained outside the framework of manipulative subject-object relations, and into the realm of “intersubjective understanding.”<sup>12</sup> In virtue of its capacity to equip individuals with the capacity to imitate, and therefore understand and accommodate the needs of the “other,” mimesis could play a potentially significant role in reconciliation. Habermas’s objection, however, consists in revealing the problematic implications in regarding this “other” as external nature, i.e. as a entity lacking the capacity to *communicate* its interests. Consequently, subject-object relations constitute an inadequate frame of reference for actions oriented towards mutual understanding. According to him, then, reconciliation ought to be turned into a matter of linguistic competence, which an inanimate party such as external nature must by definition be excluded from. If one follows the logic of Habermas’s argument, then, one becomes confronted with a particularly striking equation, namely the view that any party lacking the capacity to engage in linguistic forms of communication – the object – must necessarily be manipulated by the linguistically competent one – the subject. How, then, could Adorno

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p 390

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p 22

and Horkheimer justify their call for a reconciliation within the framework of subject-object relations?

In order to answer the above question, one must begin to re-assess the nature and significance of the “mimetic achievements,” such as Adorno’s “primacy of the object.” What the first generation theorist effectively had in mind by defending the role of the object in reflexivity, is, as Habermas himself put it, a specific achievement of the work of reason. However, what fails to transpire in second-generation critical theorists’ accounts, is the fact that Adorno interpreted mimesis as the process initiated by *reason’s reflection upon itself*, eventually leading to a reconciliation with its previously subsumed self, namely sensuous experience.<sup>13</sup> Under the principle of self-preservation, where reason is employed as a coping mechanism ultimately directed at the *mastery* of the forces of external nature and natural inclinations, an asymmetry between the cognitive and sensuous faculties becomes inevitable, thereby stifling the realisation of the aforementioned process of reconciliation. Reason’s capacity to overcome the subsumption of sensuous experience under conceptuality therefore depends upon the *elimination* of the principle of self-preservation. The individual must indeed be in a position to seek emancipation rather than survival, a condition of existence unrealisable under the permanent state of insecurity generated by the constant need to preserve the self against the forces of (internal and external) nature. Instead of attempting to step outside – as Habermas did – the framework of action giving rise to instrumental reason, Adorno in fact sought to conceptualise an alternative, non-subsumptive, relationship between cognition and sensation or, to put in his own terms, a non-identity between the subject and the object. Above all, therefore, what Adorno thought to achieve through mimesis is the reconciliation of humanity and nature (both internal and external) as a reconciliation of reason *with itself*, whereby reason *accommodates*, rather than represses, sensuous experience in emancipation. In order to illustrate such a state of affairs, one could reflect upon the contrast between a worker producing under the guise of instrumental reason, and another whose labour is mediated mimetically. In the former case, the imperatives of efficiency and productivity, and the ensuing division of labour, would ultimately stifle the possibility for the worker to be involved in the creative execution of the object he produces, for he/she is only required to employ those faculties oriented towards the maximisation of productivity within a hierarchically

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<sup>13</sup> See chapter two for a detailed account of the process of subsumption.

imposed time frame and the application of standardised production methods. In the latter case, however, the worker is said to be involved in both the design and execution of the product, thereby making it possible for his/her creativity to enter the production process.<sup>14</sup> Here a mediation of his/her instinctual energies (sensuous experience) and the planful decisions (cognitive faculties) is effectively being realised. Each product would, in this sense, become the material form of the worker's mimetically mediated instinctual and cognitive energies. Adorno, in other words, does not presume to approach nature in such a way as to treat it as another subject, but rather expects the subject to recognise its *dependence* upon the object, i.e. to recognise the *role of creative impulses in reflexivity*. In sum, therefore, any attempt to escape the framework of subject-object relations would leave untouched the very conditions upon which subsumption rests. Whereas Habermas charged Adorno with failing to step outside subject-object relations, the former could be charged with failing to look beyond the narrowly defined concept of *linguistically mediated reconciliation*, and diverting critical theory away from the roots of repression.<sup>15</sup>

Another reason for not choosing to prioritise linguistic communication in reconciliation can be found in Adorno and Horkheimer's approach to language. *Contra* Habermas, they argued that "speech geared towards intersubjective understanding itself relies [...] on the coercive, identificatory subsumption of particular objects under universal concepts [,] and that these activities are in turn animated by the drive for self-preservation."<sup>16</sup> Language, in other words, "served (and continues to serve) as a means to the end of controlling nature," and cannot qualify as the primary medium for reconciliation.<sup>17</sup> Such a critical assessment of language led Habermas to conclude that the first generation of critical theorists could only be expected to provide a "path of reconstruction [...] that cannot be traversed discursively" and, as a result, offer a restrictive account of rationality.<sup>18</sup> But, as Bernstein put it:

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<sup>14</sup> Mimetic labour, then, entails the elimination of the division of labour. The further implications of this form of mimetic labour – such as the introduction of cooperative practices into production – will be addressed later in this chapter and in chapter six.

<sup>15</sup> This criticism shall be further developed below. It must be noted here, however, that I am not alone in defending the critique of instrumental reason against Habermas's theory of communicative action. See Darrow Schechter's *The Critique of Instrumental Reason from Weber to Habermas*.

<sup>16</sup> Cook, D. (2004) *Adorno, Habermas, and the Search for a Rational Society*, London : Routledge, p 74. The second section of the present chapter will further explore the implications of linguistic communication for the elaboration of Habermas's concept of communicative reason.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p 74

<sup>18</sup> Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. I, pp 373-4

Adorno does not claim that either language or conceptuality is intrinsically identity, and that therefore a relation to the other which does not linguistically or discursively dominate must be non-discursive. On the contrary, he contends that nonidentity is “opaque only for identity’s claim to be total [...]”; and in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* he attempts to reveal how this claim became materially and historically dominant.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, whilst Adorno sought to warn us about the potential dangers associated with the prioritisation of language in reconciliation, he did not exclude it entirely from the emancipatory project. The function performed by language should instead be *qualified*. Indeed, before linguistic communication can be expected to serve reconciliation, reason must first proceed with a reflection upon itself whereby its sensuous self is *raised to the same level as cognition* and the subsumptive identity of particularity and universality is abolished. *Once it is reconciled with nature*, i.e. no longer treated as an attribute raising humanity above nature, and its universalising tendencies prevented from assuming a repressive character, language can begin to serve as a communicative medium for reconciliation.

How the first generation of critical theorists expected reconciliation to be turned into a socially cohesive phenomenon does nevertheless remain to be explored. It was Marcuse who, as was shown in chapter three,<sup>20</sup> provided the most explicit and extensive insight into the sublimation of reconciliation. It was argued that, according to him, the solution to the riddle of the relationship between “individual and universal gratification” was in fact already embodied in the primacy of the object which, by involving a reconciliation between reason and sensuous experience, ultimately serves the reconciliation of humanity with itself. Thus, the free gratification of one, or the reconciliation of an individual with his/her sensuous self, is itself the precondition of the free gratification of another – sublimation as “self-sublimation.” However, it was also argued that despite its convincing logic, this argument falls short of exploring the moment whereby one’s own reconciliation is *consciously interpreted* as the precondition of another individual’s. Indeed, as Marx pointed out in his own account of “human production,”<sup>21</sup> the self-realisation of one individual as the precondition for the self-realisation of another means that the individual must be in a position to experience the satisfaction of the needs of another individual as *one and the same* moment as the

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<sup>19</sup> Bernstein, J.M. *Recovering Ethical Life*, p 149

<sup>20</sup> See section three of this chapter.

<sup>21</sup> See chapter one, section four.

satisfaction of his/her own. Individuals must therefore find a medium through which they consciously *communicate* their interests and *engage* with those of other individuals. This *dialogical moment*, which the first generation of critical theorists have failed to explore adequately, is precisely what Habermas sought to address with his theory of communicative action. However, by turning this moment into a priority over reason's reconciliation with its sensuous self, and locating it outside the framework of subject-object relations, not only does Habermas fail to consider the non-linguistic core of reconciliation, but effectively circumvents the very relations critical theory ought to tackle. Before addressing the nature of a dialogical moment compatible with the framework of subject-object relations, an assessment of Habermas's own dialogical procedure and rationality of reconciliation will be provided. Such an exercise will indeed serve to identify the conditions under which the dialogical moment can both fail or succeed in yielding the reconciliation of humanity with both internal and external nature.

### ***On the Limitations of the Habermasian Communicative Framework***

Habermas located the process whereby “*all* participants harmonize their individual plans of action with one another and [...] pursue their illocutionary aims *without reservation*” at the core of his project of emancipation.<sup>22</sup> The success of humanity's reconciliation with itself, in this sense, is presupposed by the participants' capacity to engage in unconstrained linguistic communicative practices whereby they must all seek both to make the *particularity* of their own position explicit, and coordinate their actions in such a way as to reach a *consensus* of the various “illocutionary aims” or interests entering dialogue. At some point in the process, then, each individual will seek to accommodate the interests of others with their own. Before doing so, however, each participant must be in a position to establish, on an intersubjective basis, the validity of the claims uttered by others. It is here that Habermas turns to a central feature of communicative action, namely argumentation. Through the so-called “force of the better argument” participants are not only capable of making their own position and the reasons for such a position explicit, but also find the

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<sup>22</sup> Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. I, p 294

conditions whereby the particularity of their own interests contributes to the constitution of a general consensus. The harmonisation of individual plans of action through communicative action, then, is understood as an intersubjective *reconciliation* between the *individual* level of action and its *general* counterpart. As Habermas himself put it:

As a mechanism of socialization, the first act of reaching understanding itself sets a dialectic of universalization, particularization and individualization into motion, a dialectic which leaves *only* the differentiated *particular* in the position of an individual totality. General structures of the lifeworld, collective forms of life, and individual life histories arise within the structures of the diffracted intersubjectivity of possible understanding and are at the same time differentiated. The ego is formed equiprimordially as a subject in general, as a typical member of a social collective, and as a unique individual. The universal, particular and individual constitute themselves radially, as it were – and no longer as moments bound within a totality.<sup>23</sup>

According to Habermas, therefore, the communicative procedure whereby individuals are socialised and understanding is universalised, does not stifle the development of the individuality of the speakers but, in actual fact, stimulates it. Since the intelligibility of the process of argumentation depends on the participant's capacity to *locate* his/her interests within a pre-existing normative framework (the "general structures of the lifeworld"), the participant is said to be *socialised*. Only this way can understanding between the various participants in discourse be *universalised*. In interaction, however, the individual confronts the *general* character of the "collective forms of life" with the *uniqueness* of his/her "individual life history," and can begin to *affirm the particularity* of the latter (particularisation) as soon as the argumentative procedure is set in motion. For this reason, and because the participant "*augments* his[/her] individuality in the course of this effort," the participant is also said to be *individualised*.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Habermas argued, by maintaining each process in motion, communicative action prevents the exhaustion of the multifaceted ego formation in intersubjective communication, and can apparently serve to realise what Horkheimer and Adorno had attempted to achieve before him, namely the reconciliation of particularity and universality.

As the above observations seem to suggest, the reconciliation of particularity and universality can be realised only once the dialogical procedure is set in motion.

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<sup>23</sup> Habermas, J. "A Reply" in Honneth, A. and Joas, H. (1991) *Communicative Action: Essays on Jürgen Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action*, Cambridge: Polity Press, pp 219-220

<sup>24</sup> Wilhelm Von Humboldt cited in *ibid*, p 218

Consequently, it is thought to be inapplicable to the economy, i.e. the framework of subject-object relations. The emancipation of internal nature through communicative reason presupposes that the participant in discourse must be in a position to communicate (rationally) his or her interests in a such a way as to achieve mutual understanding, which means that he/she must only “interpret[...] the nature of his desires and feelings [*Bedürfnisnatur*]” but to do so “in the light of culturally established standards of value” as well.<sup>25</sup> Whilst such a process aims to both secure the conversion of private interests into public ones and form the basis upon which a consensus can be achieved, this “democratic generalisation of interest” would limit the dialogical procedure to the mere *interpretation* of the desires and feelings of the participant without requiring an engagement with the validity of the value standards in the light of which they ought to be interpreted, and would therefore fall short of equipping participants with the full range of communicative practices required for moral autonomy. For this reason, Habermas suggested that the dialogical procedure ought to include a process of *evaluation*, whereby participants “adopt a reflective attitude to the very value standards through which desires and feelings are interpreted.”<sup>26</sup> The “democratic *generalisation* of interests” must therefore be complemented by a “universalistic *justification* of norms.” The normative validity of the illocutionary aims of the various participants and the value standards according to which they are interpreted is, in this sense, established procedurally. In other words, any individual failing to explain and render plausible his/her attitudes and evaluations is thought to behave irrationally, and is consequently incapable of engaging in emancipation.<sup>27</sup> This is in fact why the tastes and feelings, or the possibility of other sensuous manifestations, falling within the scope of what Habermas called the “aesthetic-expressive” realm are, for the most part, considered a non-public affair. However, by emphasising the discursive distinction between the moral-universalist and the aesthetic-expressive realms in the process of interpretation, Habermas effectively turned his back on an entire dimension of reconciliation which the first generation of critical theorists had sought to realise:

Habermas labels the forms of discourse in which our need interpretations are thematized, and whose semantic content defines happiness and the good life, “aesthetic-expressive.” This, of

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<sup>25</sup> Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, p 20

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p 20

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p 17



course, coheres with the idea that the good life is a (semi-) private affair, that is non-universalizable and culturally specific, and hence outside the bounds of either truth or morality.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, by displacing reconciliation onto the dialogical level, Habermas turned the relationship between the individual and his/her internal nature into a strictly moral-universalist matter. According to Habermas's approach to emancipation, only those courses of action all participants in discourse are likely to reach an agreement on, can be considered *legitimate*. Consequently, what each participant regards as the *good* courses of action, namely those courses of action oriented towards the *happiness* of each participant, can be expected to play a role in emancipation only if other participants recognise them as legitimate in discourse. The substance of emancipation, then, is composed of elements concerning the "right life" or common good rather than those concerning the "good life" of each participant, a state of affairs which ultimately implies that "reaching agreement about what is universally good for humanity as a whole has 'absolute priority' over the particularistic good."<sup>29</sup> In response to such an observation, Habermas would suggest that although the outcome of discourse would not consist in a "consensus of hearts" it would remain a "consensus of arguments," and therefore one serving each participant in their rational self-reflective emancipation.<sup>30</sup> In other words, the fact that, through discourse, a "legitimate decision [...] is one that results from the deliberation of all," led Habermas to argue that, as the product of a so-called harmonisation of individual plans of action, the common good is effectively in line with the conception of the good life of each participant.<sup>31</sup> It could nevertheless be suggested that by turning the differentiation between the "aesthetic-expressive" and the "moral-universalist" spheres into a differentiation between private and public concerns respectively, and "defin[ing] emancipation in strictly procedural terms," Habermas eventually excludes the sensuous dimension of reconciliation from dialogue.<sup>32</sup> Whereas the first generation of critical theorists were particularly concerned with issues regarding the relationship between individuals and their sensuous selves whilst under-conceptualising the relationship between individuals themselves, Habermas's own

<sup>28</sup> Bernstein, J.M. *Recovering Ethical Life*, p 147

<sup>29</sup> Cook, D. *Adorno, Habermas, and the Search for a Rational Society*, p 157

<sup>30</sup> With such a distinction Habermas sought to differentiate his stance from Rousseau's "general will," which he also described as a "democracy of nonpublic opinion." Habermas, J. "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere" in Calhoun, C. *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, p 445.

<sup>31</sup> Manin cited in *ibid*, p 446

<sup>32</sup> Cook, D. *Adorno, Habermas, and the Search for a Rational Society*, p 152

conceptualisation of the dialogical moment runs of the risk of mistaking the rational self-reflective reconciliation *between subjects* for an all-round reconciliation of humanity *with itself*.<sup>33</sup>

The latter confusion was picked up by Seyla Benhabib in her work entitled *Critique, Norm and Utopia*. As Bernstein himself put it, she argued that Habermas's "standpoint of rights and entitlements," which was developed under the acknowledged influence of George Herbert Mead's "generalised other,"<sup>34</sup> meant that "the moral dignity of individuals derives not from what differentiates them from all others, but from what, as speaking and acting agents, they have in common with all others."<sup>35</sup> Since, in order to play a role in emancipation, the interpretation of needs required for the reconciliation of individuals with their internal nature must be recognised as legitimate by all participants in discourse, this key process of interpretation is primarily the result of a process of universalisation. The non-identical, here, is effectively being "dialogised" and, one could even argue, disciplined by language. Thus, by approaching the interpretation of needs from the moral-universalist standpoint of intersubjectively recognised rights and obligations, Habermas is forced to *subsume* the process of particularisation *under* the process of universalisation. As a corrective to such a state of affairs, Benhabib proposed

to view each other and every rational being as an individual with a concrete history, identity, and affective-emotional constitution. Our relation to the other is governed by the norm of *complementary reciprocity*: each is entitled to expect and to assume from the other forms of behaviour through which the other feels recognized and confirmed as a concrete, individual being with specific needs, talents, and capacities. The norms of our interaction are... the norms of solidarity, friendship, love and care.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Chapters six and seven of the present work will suggest a resolution to this dilemma.

<sup>34</sup> Habermas credited Mead for identifying the dynamics of a form of authority which "differs from authority based only over the means of sanction, in that it rests on assent. When A regards the group sanctions *as his own*, as sanctions he directs at himself, he has to presuppose his assent to the norm whose violation he punishes in this way. Unlike socially generalized imperatives, institutions claim a validity that rests on intersubjective recognition, on the consent of those affected by it [...]" In this sense, Mead is also credited, albeit implicitly, for serving as a more democratic alternative to Rousseau's "general will," which, as a "generalized *will of all* individuals" can only "express[...] itself in the sanctions the group applies to deviations," and therefore excludes the intersubjective and consensual basis upon which the rights and obligations of those affected by it could rest. Habermas, J. (1987) *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. II, Boston: Beacon Press, pp 38-9

<sup>35</sup> Bernstein, J.M. *Recovering Ethical Life*, p 151

<sup>36</sup> Seyla Benhabib cited in *ibid*, p 151

In her attempt to overcome the subsumption of particularity under universality, Benhabib sought to combine elements of Adorno's philosophy of non-identity with elements of Habermas's theory of communicative action. The substitution of the "generalised other" with a "concrete other," allows participants in discourse to address each other's interests from the standpoint of "needs and solidarity."<sup>37</sup> No longer treating each other as rational beings abstracted from their "specific needs, talents, and capacities" and prioritising the normative generalisation of their interests, the various participants can begin to engage in a dialogue whereby the realisation of their concrete selves is made the priority of their interpretation of needs. Actions oriented towards mutual understanding cease to manifest themselves as ones primarily directed at the compliance with normative standards, and can begin to allow each participant in discourse to "expect and entitle" others to "feel confirmed and recognised" as particular beings. On this account, discourse could more effectively give the plurality of interests constituting social life their due, and turn the attainment of the common good into the outcome of a process of particularisation *unstifled* by the process of universalisation. By re-positioning the communicative framework of action in such a way as to accommodate the sensuous experiences constitutive of each individual's plan of action and, consequently, turning discourse into a process potentially capable of assigning a central role to the good life in emancipation, Benhabib made it possible to begin to envisage how the reconciliation between individuals could *simultaneously* serve the reconciliation between humanity and internal nature.<sup>38</sup>

So far, it has been suggested that Habermas attributes, at best, a secondary significance to mimetic knowledge in emancipation. It has been shown that, as a result of treating sensuous experience as a primarily private affair and conceptualising intersubjective reconciliation as a process involving rational subjects unreconciled with their sensuous selves, Habermas had ultimately failed to elaborate a dialogical moment capable of combining *moral autonomy* and *self-realisation*. The reasons leading Habermas to both adopt such a stance regarding the place of sensuous experience in emancipation and maintain that a process of particularisation can exist alongside a process of universalisation do nevertheless remain to be both clarified and further assessed. Indeed, whilst one can understand why a consensus of arguments can be

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p 151

<sup>38</sup> Benhabib's framework does nevertheless contain several limitations, some of which will be the object of the next section of this chapter.

expected to reflect the rational interests of the various participants in discourse, the claim according to which this consensus is expected to reflect the good life of each participant stands in need of justification. Habermas's exploration of the relationship between reason and the senses undertaken in *Knowledge and Human Interests* should provide an explanation. Drawing his inspiration from Kant's "pure interest of reason," Habermas argued the following:

The (pathological) interest of the senses in what is pleasant or useful *arises* from need; the (practical) interest of reason in the good *awakens* a need. In the former case the faculty of desire is stimulated by inclination; in the latter it is determined by principles of reason. By analogy with sensual inclination as habitualized desire, we may speak of an intellectual inclination free of the senses if it is formed from a pure interest as a permanent attitude [...] <sup>39</sup>

The practical interest of reason, or interest deriving from practical reason, is thought to "awaken a need" since, as Habermas further suggested, it is an interest that "aims at existence, because it expresses a relation of the object of interest to our faculty of desire."<sup>40</sup> Habermas was able to draw such conclusions following his assessment of Kant's own attempt to find out "how a mere thought, which contained nothing of the senses, could produce a sensation of pleasure and pain."<sup>41</sup> Whereas Kant sought to solve the latter riddle by exploring the path of causality between theoretical reason and sensation, Habermas questioned the capacity of a form of reason *abstracted from* actions to produce sensations of pleasure and pain. The latter argued that in order to be able to yield such results, reason must in fact be *oriented towards* action. This is precisely what led him to turn to practical reason which, he argued, could effectively serve as a framework within which conceptions of a pleasurable or good life can be formulated. Thus, although understood as a form of "intellectual inclination free of the senses," practical reason is thought to be capable of *stimulating* the needs making up the conception of the good life of each participant in discourse. However, within the communicative framework of Habermas's practical discourse, practical reason orients itself towards a particular set of actions, namely those aimed at reaching a mutual understanding. Within this framework of action, the interpretation of needs of each participant develops *in relation* to the interpretation of needs of other participants in

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<sup>39</sup> Habermas, J. *Knowledge and Human Interests*, p 199

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p 198

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p 201

discourse, thus leaving no room for a conception of the good life formulated independently of the intersubjective recognition of norms. Thus, as Deborah Cook pointed out, “in Habermas’ work, the particular refers, not primarily to individuals, but to collective forms of life in which individuals take shape by developing their own personalities through identification with social groups and collectively shared values and goals.”<sup>42</sup> As the discursively produced interpretation of needs turns the particularity of pleasure into a product of reason – as “pleasure in the fulfilment of duty” – the sensuous particularity of the good life itself becomes effectively *dissolved* in the moral universality of the “collective forms of life.”<sup>43</sup> It could therefore be suggested that Habermas’s definition of both emancipation *and* the interpretation of needs in strictly moral-procedural terms, turns his attempt to harmonise individual plans of action into a subsumption of the latter under the universality of the common good.

The origins of such a state of affairs can be traced back to Habermas’s own point of departure. As was shown above, part of his conceptualisation of the conditions for human emancipation involved an attempt to provide an answer to the riddle Kant himself had tried to resolve, namely how a thought could produce a sensation of pleasure and pain. Thus, instead of seeking to identify the conditions under which thought could *assist* the realisation of our sensuous nature in emancipation, Habermas “demot[ed] human desires to the status of subjective expressions that lack any natural, material, or even social referents,” thereby *submitting* internal nature to thought itself, i.e. to reason.<sup>44</sup> Here, a clear departure from the first generation of the Frankfurt School’s own project of emancipation can be observed:

Against the Freudian project of bringing our rational powers into harmony with the instincts – the project that Adorno embraced – Habermas suggests that reason and desire have already been reconciled: desire is just the subjective expression of disembodied needs that are rational, at least in principle, because they cannot be divorced from their articulation in speech.<sup>45</sup>

According to Habermas, then, the critical theorist is not required to seek the reconciliation of sensuous experience and reason in emancipation, for as merely “subjective expressions,” desires bear no relation to the objective world – the very

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<sup>42</sup> Cook, D. *Adorno, Habermas, and the Search for a Rational Society*, p 156

<sup>43</sup> Habermas, J. *Knowledge and Human Interests*, p 201

<sup>44</sup> Cook, D. *Adorno, Habermas, and the Search for a Rational Society*, p 85

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, p 86

world which the senses belong to. Language, he thought, is oriented towards the “[e]mancipation *from* the compulsion of internal nature [italics added].”<sup>46</sup> However, by “linguistif[ying] desire in order to domesticate it”<sup>47</sup> Habermas subordinates internal nature to reason, thereby revealing, in a somewhat Kantian vein, his antagonism to natural inclinations and reproducing the conditions of existence which Adorno had associated with the repression of internal nature. In sum, therefore, Habermas’s attempt to harmonise the individual plans of action in his theory of communicative action led him to abandon the project of self-realisation in favour of a conceptual framework both reproducing the subsumption of particularity under universality characterising the repression of nature by humanity, and stripping the latter of its sensuous dimension.

With the subject ridden of its somatic self, the issue of the motivation bringing individuals into a dialogue governed by communicative reason and aimed at the emancipation of internal nature arises. Habermas summarised the distinctive nature of communicative action as follows:

I shall speak of *communicative* action whenever the actions of the agents involved are coordinated not through egocentric calculations of success but through acts of reaching understanding. In communicative action participants are not primarily oriented to their own individual successes; they pursue their individual goals under the condition that they can harmonize their plans of action on the basis of common situation definitions. In this respect the negotiation of definitions of the situation is an essential element of the interpretive accomplishments required for communicative action.<sup>48</sup>

The pursuit of individual goals in practical discourse, then, cannot assume the form of an orientation towards individual success, for it is dependent on the successful coordination of the participants’ actions. However, one is here justified in asking why individuals come to believe in the necessity to depend on a rational consensus achieved through dialogue in order to emancipate individual from their natural inclinations. If it is indeed the case that, as was shown above, Habermas views internal nature as a phenomenon “entirely generated by communicative practices,”<sup>49</sup> then it must follow that the “discursively produced and intersubjectively shared beliefs” themselves are endowed with the “*motivating* force” behind actions oriented towards the emancipation

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<sup>46</sup> Habermas, J. *Knowledge and Human Interests*, p 53

<sup>47</sup> Cook, D. *Adorno, Habermas, and the Search for a Rational Society*, pp 88-9

<sup>48</sup> Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol I, p 285-6

<sup>49</sup> Cook, D. *Adorno, Habermas, and the Search for a Rational Society*, p 88

of internal nature.<sup>50</sup> From this perspective, the mere capacity to exercise “the public use of communicative freedom” in order express “good reasons” for performing particular speech acts appears, as Habermas himself put it, as a “weak” but *sufficient* motivating force behind procedural emancipation.<sup>51</sup> According to such line of thought, then, the fact that internal nature is mediated by language is, in itself, a sufficient reason for supposing that, under conditions of unrestrained communication, individuals will seek to “pursue their individual goals under the condition that they can harmonize their plans of action,” i.e. to engage in communicative action.

However, as soon as the competitive and insecure environment characteristic of the capitalist mode of production is taken into consideration, the weakness of such a motivating force suddenly surfaces as an all-to-evident problem. Whereas Habermas would maintain that the linguistic mediation of nature necessarily brings individuals into a dialogue with each other, his analytical distinction between the system and the lifeworld means that he fell short of assessing the extent to which the pressure induced by economic scarcity could undermine the motivations leading them to attempt to reach an *agreement* in discourse. Furthermore, if, according to Habermas, *non-discursive* factors such as systemic imperatives have the capacity to enter into and affect communicative practices why, then, does he exclude such a typology of factors from the set of *motivations* lying behind actions oriented towards mutual understanding? One may indeed be required to step outside language in order to understand not only what *prevents* individuals from engaging in actions oriented towards mutual understanding, but also what *motivates* them, for in order to decide to engage in a discourse seeking to achieve a consensus they must first be in a position to realise that they indeed *need* to do so. As it currently stands, Habermas’s communicative framework fails to account for such motivations. As Cook put it:

He [...] makes it difficult to understand what motivates human behaviour, including communicative action. Reaching agreement may be the telos of communicative action, but it is not at all clear that this goal is the sole motivation for communicative action. For one can always ask a further question: Agreement for what purpose? Understanding to what end? The goal of reaching agreement on validity claims is always pursued within particular contexts that define

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<sup>50</sup> Habermas, J. *Between Facts and Norms*, p 147

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, p 147

the aims such agreement will serve. What motivates individuals to pursue these further aims is moot.<sup>52</sup>

Whilst Habermas's theory of communicative action clearly, albeit problematically, seeks to explain the *centrality* of dialogue in human emancipation, it fails to demonstrate why the various participants would seek to do so by attempting to achieve a consensus rather than pursuing their individual interests. One may indeed seriously question the capacity of individuals forced to compete in the satisfaction of their needs to bracket their orientations towards success in favour of actions oriented towards mutual understanding. Habermas's failure to tackle this issue in a sufficiently extensive manner could be attributed to the fact that "[b]y linguistifying needs, Habermas confuses the linguistic articulation of needs with needs themselves," thereby dissolving the motivations behind discursive interaction within the discursive procedure itself, and turning his critical theory into one incapable of giving recognition to the factors stimulating individuals' decisions to emancipate themselves through actions oriented towards mutual understanding.<sup>53</sup> As a result, Habermas falls short of completing the task he had set himself, and ultimately causes his critical theory to operate in the shadow of liberal thought.

In sum, therefore, a critical theory realistically seeking to turn the reconciliation of humanity and nature into a process applicable to society at large must attempt both to *safeguard the dialogical process* against the repressive tendencies of the subsumption of particularity under universality and, in order to identify the conditions under which individuals choose to reach an agreement, *distinguish* the motivations leading individuals to engage in discourse from the discursive procedure itself. For such reasons, as it currently stands, the dialogical procedure suggested by Habermas cannot be expected to yield the rationality of reconciliation required for human emancipation. The realisation of the latter is in fact dependent upon the recognition of the role played by mimetic knowledge<sup>54</sup> in emancipation, for it would not only ensure the maintenance of the good life in the face of a universalising force such as the common good, but also enable critical theory to trace the decisions to engage in dialogue back to the spontaneous particularity of human existence, i.e. the natural inclinations. The next section of the present chapter, as well as the next two chapters shall attempt to show

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<sup>52</sup> Cook, D. Adorno, *Habermas, and the Search for a Rational Society*, p 171

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p 171

<sup>54</sup> The form of dialogue such an alternative entails will be explored below.



how dialogue can be expected to give the reconciliation of reason and the senses in emancipation its due.

### *Towards a Communicative Basis for the Reconciliation of Subject and Object*

As the preceding section partly attempted to demonstrate, Habermas's attempt to harmonise the individual plans of action fails to counter the universalising tendencies of reason identified by the members of the earlier generation of Frankfurt School theorists – especially Adorno – as key factors causing the repression of internal nature. In response to such a problem, Seyla Benhabib suggested a revision<sup>55</sup> of the dialogical procedure in such a way as to allow the participants to develop an intersubjective interpretation of needs whereby they recognise and confirm each other as “concrete others,” thus defending an approach to dialogue from the standpoint of “needs and solidarity” against one approached, as Habermas himself did, from the standpoint of “rights and entitlements.” The advantage of adopting such a standpoint, she argued, lies in the possibility for each participant in discourse to achieve a “complementary reciprocity” between individuals treating each other as beings with “specific needs, talents, and capacities.” Here, the discursive manifestation of reason would no longer give absolute priority to the common good, often manifesting itself as economic stability, growth and full employment in advanced capitalist societies. Instead, each participant is thought to be reconciled with their internal nature whilst seeking to experience the satisfaction of another's needs as an integral part of his/her satisfaction of needs. As such, it could be suggested that Benhabib elaborated a conceptual framework potentially capable of circumventing the problems found in Habermas's own.

The fact of introducing the concrete particularity of individuals' existence into the communicative framework of action does nevertheless raise several issues regarding the role of communicative reason in emancipation. If one accepts, as Benhabib did, that the concrete particularity of existence can indeed be introduced into the communicative

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<sup>55</sup> Benhabib is not alone in seeking to revise Habermas's communicative framework of action in such a way as to give greater recognition to the material and emotional needs of individuals. Axel Honneth, for example, sought to approach reconciliation from the standpoint of “struggles for recognition.” According to Honneth, Habermas has failed to provide a theoretical framework capable of both comprehending social injustices and providing a basis upon which these can be overcome. See Honneth, A. (1995) *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, Cambridge: Polity Press

framework of action, one faces the task of establishing the origins of the needs interpreted in the discursive realm. Whilst her emphasis on the concrete particularity of individuals' existence implies that one can trace such origins by turning to the non-discursive realm, the view that the reconciliation of humanity and nature depends on a "complementary reciprocity" realised through discourse also seems to suggest that each participant's conception of the good life cannot be formulated outside the framework of communicative action. The sociological deficit found in Habermas's own theory of communicative action therefore remains. One does indeed remain unsure as to where the various conceptions of the good life are said to unfold – work, the family, the public sphere? Casting such a doubt on Benhabib's own revision is the fact that a tension between needs originating from the non-discursive realm and those originating from the discursive one can be observed. This is problematic as it means that her framework cannot be safeguarded against a confusion between the needs themselves and their linguistic articulation. At the roots of such a problem lies her rejection, shared with Habermas, of subject-object relations from the communicative framework of action. Here is how Bernstein summarised her reasons for rejecting such a model:

[S]he argues that, firstly, the category of "objectification," as employed within the labour model of activity, is inadequate to characterize communicative activities; secondly, that this model of activity is fundamentally monological, moving from ideas in the head to actions in the world, and hence abstracts from the linguistic mediation of desires, intentions and purposes; thirdly, in so doing it illegitimately suppresses the interpretive indeterminacy of human action; fourthly, it is only as a consequence of the suppression of the interpretive indeterminacy of human action that the model of a trans-subjective subject comes into being, but such a subject involves a denial of the inescapable fact of human *plurality*; finally, the model of self-actualization operative in the philosophy of the subject assumes "an epistemologically transparent self, who seems to possess unequivocal knowledge for determining what would 'actualize' him/her" [...]; as such, it suppresses the very situatedness that characterizes interpersonal existence.<sup>56</sup>

According to Benhabib, the framework of subject-object relations, as Habermas himself had pointed out, restricts the scope of human action. The subject is here understood as a manipulative and conscious being with determinate needs interpreted and satisfied monologically through the efficient mastery of external nature. For these reasons, not only is the subject-object framework of action thought to reduce

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<sup>56</sup> Bernstein, J. *Recovering Ethical Life*, pp 139-40

interpersonal existence to *actions* oriented towards *success* and *relations of power*, it is also believed to be incapable of accommodating the *dialogical* basis upon which the “interpretive indeterminacy of human action” is thought to rest. According to Benhabib, then, the *plurality* of needs interpretations must be understood in terms of the *situatedness* of interpersonal existence, whose actualisation requires an intersubjective framework of action. As such, the various needs, talents and capacities of the participants in discourse bear no relevance to human emancipation until they are intersubjectively interpreted through the discursive process or, as Benhabib herself would put it, until their complementary reciprocity with the needs, talents and capacities of others is established. However, by reducing the plurality of need interpretations to the situatedness of interpersonal relations achieved through linguistic communication, Benhabib, like Habermas before her, effectively dissolved the concrete particularity of individual existence in the indeterminacy of linguistically mediated interpersonal existence. It could therefore be suggested that she proposed to substitute a framework of subject-object relations “denying the inescapable fact of human plurality” with an intersubjective model which, by dissolving internal nature in language and consequently confusing the needs themselves and their linguistic articulation, fails to secure the non-identity of subject and object, thereby effectively cancelling the possibility of pluralist politics. The search for a single framework of action capable of giving both the *situatedness* of *interpersonal* existence and the *concrete particularity* of *human* existence their due continues.

Both Habermas and Benhabib sought to harmonise the individual plans of action oriented towards the emancipation of internal nature by stepping outside the framework of subject-object relations. Whilst the former’s somewhat evident neglect of the sensuous particularity of human existence in emancipation led him to achieve the very opposite of his intentions, i.e. to reproduce repressive conditions of existence, the latter’s insistence on the need for all participants in discourse to treat each other as “concrete others” fell short of overcoming the problems associated with the theory of communicative action. Benhabib’s unsuccessful attempt could in fact be attributed to a lack of consideration of the full epistemological implications to be drawn out of the recognition of others in their concrete particularity. As Bernstein put it:

The meaning of universality in the context of need interpretations will have to shift away from the paradigm of communication altogether since it will have an epistemic component equivalent

to whatever is involved in recognizing others in their concrete particularity, which, again, is what Adorno employs art in order to interrogate; and hence an alternative conception of what universality means for ethical theory if need interpretation is nonetheless going to be an element of a universalistic moral theory.<sup>57</sup>

What form, then, would “an epistemic component equivalent to whatever is involved in recognizing others in their concrete particularity” assume? In order to provide an answer, one must first seek to explain what the concrete particularity in question consists of. According to Benhabib, it refers to the specific needs, talents and capacities of a *rational being* with a “concrete history, identity, and *affective-emotional* constitution.” The dialogical formation of the interpretation of needs she proposed therefore requires each participant to recognise the (partly) sensuous origins of the other participants’ desires. Contra Habermas, then, Benhabib opens up the possibility for participants to both address their internal nature as an objective – and not merely subjective – reality, and to turn the object as the *substance* of their needs. The epistemic component corresponding to such a schema would thus presuppose a form of universality capable of yielding expressive potential to the spontaneity of natural inclinations,<sup>58</sup> so that the rapidly changing character of the emotional impulses can be accommodated in the interpretation of needs. The role of subject-object relations in framing the interpretation of needs must, in this sense, be given recognition. However, her failure to proceed with a “presentation of the misrepresentations of subject and substance, of *subjects as substance* [emphasis added]” in the framework elaborated by Habermas, compounded with the view according to which no subject-object relations can successfully accommodate the plurality of existence, prevented her from accepting the necessity to re-evaluate the role of such relations in framing the interpretation of needs.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, although Benhabib emphasised the need for participants to treat each other as “concrete others,” her failure to safeguard her theoretical framework against the dissolution of internal nature in language led her to accept blindly the grounding of objectivity in the subject accomplished by Habermas in his theory of communicative action. Furthermore, since she maintained, again like Habermas, that the scope of human action yielded by the framework of subject-object relations remains, whatever its

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p 154

<sup>58</sup> See chapter two for a more detailed account of the relationship between universality and natural inclinations.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p 156

form, too narrow to be capable of accommodating the reconciliation of humanity and internal nature, she was ultimately forced to discipline the “concrete other” with the universalising tendencies of the situatedness of interpersonal existence in her understanding of the plurality of human action. As a result, instead of drawing on the full epistemological implications of her inclusion of the concrete other in dialogue and treating the “purely particular activity and business of the individual” in relation to the “needs which he has as a part of nature,”<sup>60</sup> Benhabib reproduced the divorce of the logic of emancipation between humanity and external nature from the logic of emancipation between humanity and internal nature found in Habermas’s theory of communication, thereby *separating* the “epistemic component” of the latter *from* “whatever is involved in recognizing others in their concrete particularity.” For this reason, the socio-epistemological dualism restricting the emancipation of internal nature to actions governed by communicative rationality must be overcome in favour of an emancipatory logic of action whereby the actualisation of the plurality of human action, referring to both the situatedness of interpersonal existence *and* the concrete particularity of individual existence, can be framed by the reconciliation of every *rational being* (subject) with their existence as *beings belonging to nature* (object). Under what conditions, then, can such an emancipatory framework be expected to fulfil its promises?

Firstly, a confusion between the needs themselves and their linguistic articulation must be prevented. As such, the linguistification of internal nature must be abandoned in favour of a form of reconciliation whereby knowledge becomes mimetically mediated. At the epistemological level, such a task involves a departure from the subjectivist tendencies of communicative rationality, towards a form of knowledge capable of *reconciling the universal and the particular*.<sup>61</sup> At the level of the needs themselves, such a task involves turning *both* internal and external nature, i.e. sensory experience in general, into the *fabric of knowledge* one has of his/her needs, thereby treating the emancipation of internal nature as a phenomenon inextricably *linked* to the relationship between humanity and external nature. Finally, at the level of social actions, it involves *anchoring* communicative practices in the sphere of *labour*, where dialogue could *simultaneously* serve the reconciliation of subject and object, and the actualisation of this same reconciliation on a societal scale.

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<sup>60</sup> Adorno, T.W. *Negative Dialectics*, pp 376-7

<sup>61</sup> I shall further analyse this alternative form of rationality later in this section.

Secondly, and as a general precondition for the aforementioned task, the critical theorist must accept the possibility of a subject-object framework of action stripped of the manipulative tendencies of a sovereign subject oriented towards the preservation of the self. In order to do so, one must step outside the bourgeois-productivist model of labour – preserved by Habermas in his theoretical framework – in which humanity seeks to dominate external nature<sup>62</sup> and alongside which this same subject treats internal nature as an entity to be disciplined by language. One therefore ought to move away from a conception of emancipatory practice denying a role to sensory experience. Whilst such a task involves re-positioning of reconciliation within the framework of subject-object relations, it also corresponds to a transformation of the relationship between humanity and nature into one mediated by labour as a process of *self-realisation*, i.e. a process whereby, as Marx himself put it, “human activity itself” is conceived as “objective activity”<sup>63</sup> and “man is affirmed [...] not only in thought but *through all his senses* [italics added].”<sup>64</sup> Under such a state of affairs, the possibility of maintaining the non-identity of subject and object defended by the first generation of critical theorists<sup>65</sup> is secured by stripping labour of its imperatives of efficiency and productivity, and turning it into an activity oriented towards the release of creative impulses. As such, labour would effectively perform the role of *mimetic mediation* between humanity and nature, and serve as a basis upon which it becomes “possible to transform individual need into an aesthetic value with cognitive content.”<sup>66</sup> The reconciliation of reason and the senses in knowledge mimetically mediated by labour is, here, *synonymous* with the reconciliation of humanity with both internal and external nature.

Thirdly, the project of human emancipation approached from the reconciliation of subject and object involves envisaging a radically different way of experiencing social life which, as Adorno suggested, can immediately be appreciated only though

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<sup>62</sup> It was argued in the third section of chapter four that Habermas’s reduction of labour to instrumental forms of action corresponds to a de-historicisation of what is but a tendency of the capitalist mode of production. It is being argued here that Benhabib’s reasons for excluding objectification from her conception of human emancipation reflects such a conceptual blindness.

<sup>63</sup> Marx, K. “Theses on Feuerbach,” p 171

<sup>64</sup> Marx, K. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p 101

<sup>65</sup> See chapter two.

<sup>66</sup> Schecter, D. *Beyond Hegemony*, p 160. The contrast between a worker producing under the guise of instrumental reason, and another engaging in labour through mimetic mediation exposed in section one of the present chapter served to as a practical illustration of such a phenomenon.

autonomous art. This new set of experiences correspond to what Adorno called the “aesthetic feeling,” which he interpreted as follows:

Aesthetic feeling is not what is being aroused in us. It is more like a sense of wonderment in the presence of what we behold; a sense of being overwhelmed in the presence of a phenomenon that is nonconceptual while at the same time being determinate. The arousal of subjective effect by art is the last thing we should want to dignify with the name of aesthetic feeling. True aesthetic feeling is oriented to the object; it is the feeling of the object, not some reflex in the viewer.<sup>67</sup>

Understood as neither a compulsive nor a conceptual phenomenon, the aesthetic feeling lies *between* the sensuous and cognitive realms. It arises from the mimetic mediation of individuals’ instinctual energies (sensuous experience) and their capacity to choose the best course of action (cognitive faculties) in, say, the production of object or the mere interpretation of needs. As the product of the reconciliation of reason and the senses, then, its content arises from the object, whilst its *determinacy* is “brought about by the universal sustaining medium,” i.e. the concept.<sup>68</sup> As such, the aesthetic feeling expresses a *non-identical*, yet *relational*, moment between the subject and the object. It is a *reflexive* moment experienced as a “feeling for the object,” made possible by the *unifying*, yet *non-subsumptive*, force of a universal flexible enough to “accept what is other to it as other,” and therefore capable of giving the particularity of human existence, suppressed by existing rationality and non-discoverable by its communicative form, its due.<sup>69</sup> In other words, “aesthetic behaviour is the ability to see more in things than they are [in accordance with conceptual frameworks].”<sup>70</sup> A form of human emancipation approached from the standpoint of the reconciliation of subject and object therefore requires one to overcome the subsumption of the *good* life under the *right* life and turn the former into the substance of morality by substituting communicative rationality with a form of rationality capable of turning the aesthetic feeling into a *reflexive force*, i.e. an *aesthetic rationality*. It requires one to look beyond the principle of self-preservation as a result of which existing rationality came to treat the aesthetic feeling as a foe of reason. Thus, whilst the major social, political, economic and intellectual transformations of the modern age all serve to indicate that the subject is

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<sup>67</sup> Adorno, T.W. *Aesthetic Theory*, p 236

<sup>68</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, pp 376-7

<sup>69</sup> Jarvis, S. *Adorno: A Critical Introduction*, p 188

<sup>70</sup> Adorno cited in Bernstein, J. *Recovering Ethical Life*, p 150

now equipped with the capacity to engage with the object in reflexive terms, they have demonstrated that at both the epistemological (Cartesian dualism) and sociological (division of labour) levels, such a reflexivity has tended to subsume the particularising tendencies of objectivity under the universalising ones of subjectivity. The task of critical theory, therefore, is to ensure that what Adorno believes autonomous art to be the sole outlet for, namely an aesthetic feeling that “keeps alive the memory of a kind of objectivity which lies beyond conceptual frameworks,”<sup>71</sup> is diffused within social life as whole. Critical theory must therefore seek, as Marcuse put it, the “abolition of art” by stripping subject-object relations of the division of labour, which prevents humanity’s recognition of itself as a part of, albeit irreducible to, external nature.<sup>72</sup> Whereas this may lead to a new form of rationality to which correspond new forms of social experiences, its being an act whereby the *memory of a phenomenon is “kept alive”* means that it does not correspond to the realisation of a utopia, but to the mere actualisation “of what reason is like,”<sup>73</sup> or the realisation of a *latent potentiality* which only an age characterised by a reflexive relation between subject and object can be expected to bring about. This is in fact why one speaks here of “reconciliation,” i.e. of a mediated non-identity of humanity and nature, whose historical possibility was both opened up and denied by modernity, can finally be realised.

The final condition regards the manner in which dialogue can be expected to accommodate the form of rationality corresponding to the reconciliation of humanity and nature. As Habermas and Benhabib have themselves already demonstrated, the possibility of giving the situatedness of interpersonal existence in the process of harmonisation of individual plans of action its due depends on the introduction of a dialogue as its fundamental communicative medium. However, as has also been shown, human emancipation, if approached from the standpoint of the reconciliation of humanity and nature, can only be expected both to give the particularity of human existence its due and to assume a socially cohesive form if this dialogue can successfully turn the free gratification of one into the precondition for the free gratification of all. Since the latter depends on the possibility for each individual’s satisfaction of needs to be consciously and simultaneously experienced as the

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p 150

<sup>72</sup> See chapter three for a detailed account of Marcuse’s call for the “abolition of art.”

<sup>73</sup> Jarvis, S. *Adorno: A Critical Introduction*, p 178



satisfaction of the needs of others,<sup>74</sup> the role played by dialogue would become one of a medium through which the needs of individuals engaged in a self-realising transformation of nature can be communicated to each other. Dialogue would *not*, in this sense, directly serve as the communicative medium between humanity and external nature, but would rather take place between individuals conscious of their needs *as beings belonging to nature*, but not reducible to it.<sup>75</sup>

Furthermore, since, as Marx himself pointed out, a process of self-realisation involves actions oriented towards both production *and* consumption,<sup>76</sup> individuals will tend to seek the satisfaction of their needs from the perspective of the producer as well as the consumer. Although the needs of individuals producing objects or providing a service effectively differ from the needs of individuals consuming these goods and services, the task at hand, here, is to anticipate the possibility for both dimensions to yield *pleasure*. Indeed, whilst under the principle of self-preservation, workers are denied the possibility of experiencing pleasure in labour through the repressive force stemming from the imperatives of efficiency and productivity, a similar form of repression identified by Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse in their critique of the culture industry is in fact also experienced by consumers of mass culture. For in both cases, individuals' incapacity to engage in both production and consumption in such a way as to experience pleasure can be traced back to the asymmetry between sensuous experience and cognitive faculties in their interpretation of needs: the repression of natural inclinations by instrumental reason for the worker turning their activity into toil, and the unrestrained (and non-reflexive) release of instinctual energies for the consumer both limiting pleasure to mere entertainment, and subjecting individuals' reflexive capacity to the psycho-mechanisms upon which consumerist culture of advanced capitalism relies.<sup>77</sup> It follows that a self-realising satisfaction of needs rests on a

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<sup>74</sup> See the third section of chapter three.

<sup>75</sup> Although this form of communicative practice appears, at first glance, to depart significantly from the "communicative theory of nature" defended by Steven Vogel in his work entitled *Against Nature : The Concept of Nature in Critical Theory*, it constitutes a first a necessary step towards its implementation. I am in fact suggesting here that the recognition of the social character of nature entailed by the former can only be safeguarded against anthropocentrism if individuals' communicative recognition of themselves as beings belonging to nature is given its due in subject-object relations. With the two aspects combined, the view according to which humanity belongs to nature whilst not being reducible to it can be given practical realisation.

<sup>76</sup> Marx presented the process of satisfaction of in terms of production and "enjoyment or use." See chapter one.

<sup>77</sup> The unrestrained release of instinctual energies is said to assume a repressive form here, for it effectively strips individuals of their capacity to engage reflexively with the products they consume. Marcuse called this phenomenon "repressive desublimation."

successful *coordination* of the needs of individuals as both producers and consumers, and is, in this sense, dependent upon a communicative framework of action.<sup>78</sup> Thus, whilst the *mimetic interpretation of needs* would allow the aesthetic feeling to manifest itself as an *orientation* towards the object from the standpoint of the *producer* and the *consumer*, and turn such a feeling into the *basis* for emancipation as the reconciliation of reason and the senses in reflexivity, dialogue would not only make it possible to turn the free gratification of one into the precondition for the free gratification of all by *situating* such an interpretation interpersonally, i.e. as a *morally* oriented process *complementing* self-realisation, but also by turning the conscious communication of the needs of individuals as both producers and consumers into a form of coordination *directly* contributing to self-realisation. Here, however, dialogue would not effectively serve as the chief basis upon which needs come to be interpreted – as is the case with Habermas and Benhabib – but would instead make its contribution to emancipation by *coordinating* the two dimensions of internal nature (production and consumption) serving the mimetic interpretation of needs.

### *Concluding remarks*

Habermas's call for a departure from the critique of instrumental reason in favour of a theory of communicative action has been motivated by a firm belief in the need to introduce a framework of action suitable for the actualisation of a form of emancipation approached from the standpoint of *reconciliation*. In virtue of their necessarily manipulative character, he argued, subject-object relations cannot provide a basis for actions seeking to accommodate the point of view of others. Instead, one must seek to raise humanity higher and above external nature, and turn to language. However, by doing so, he effectively paved the way for those conditions of existence which the earlier generation of Frankfurt School theorists (Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse) had identified as the seeds of a *repressive* social order. Indeed, his understanding of the emancipation of internal nature as a process exclusively confined to actions governed by communicative reason not only led him to subsume individual conceptions of the good life under the common good, thereby reproducing the *subsumption* of particularity and

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<sup>78</sup> The next chapter shall provide a more detailed analysis of this approach to the self-realising satisfaction of needs, but that time, in the more specific context of institutionalisation

universality, but also caused him to *liquidate* the somatic dimension of human existence. In response to such pernicious orientations, it was suggested that humanity be *re-positioned* within external nature. Such a conceptual turn, however, necessitates one to elaborate a framework of action whereby the prospects of human emancipation on a societal scale rest on a subject capable of recognising its *dependence* on the object, on a form of *reflexivity* arising from the mimetically mediated reconciliation of reason and senses, and on a *communicative* medium whereby the free gratification of one can be turned into the precondition for the free gratification of all and become the basis for the growth of an *organic form of morality*.<sup>79</sup> For these reasons, it was finally suggested a dialogue be *organised* among individuals conscious of their *needs as both producers and consumers belonging to nature*. In the following two chapters, I shall proceed with a detailed exploration of the socio-political institutions capable of accommodating such demands.

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<sup>79</sup> In the next chapter I shall provide a more detailed analysis of this form of morality and of the institutional framework required for its development.

## **Chapter 6**

### Drawing the Contours of Institutionalised Emancipatory Practice

In the last chapter I sought to show that one ought to elaborate a practical content aimed at turning the realisation of the sensuous particularity of individuals into a key element of emancipatory practice. Frankfurt school critical theorists, with the possible exception of Habermas, have nevertheless refrained from adopting a prescriptive practical stance.<sup>1</sup> The reason for this is their conceptualisation of critical theory's task as a merely diagnostic one. Critical theory, they argue, can only be expected to negate the existing world. However, as chapter three demonstrated, the principle of negativity itself, in virtue of its opposition to the status quo, necessarily entails considerations and anticipations regarding what the status quo is *not*. It was suggested that critical theory should indeed fulfil its own, at times unacknowledged, promises and harness the positive content of negativity in such a way as to provide an insight into alternative objective conditions of existence.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter I shall attempt to employ critical theory in the aforementioned manner, and seek to reveal the *affinity* between the earlier generation of the Frankfurt School and the libertarian socialism of G.D.H. Cole.

#### ***Democracy and the Reconciliation of Humanity and Nature***

Habermas was the first member of the Frankfurt School to engage in a theoretical exercise partly aimed at drawing the contours of the democratic processes through which individuals can find the practical means for the emancipation of their internal nature from the repressive mechanisms of advanced capitalism. One could indeed find a significant concern with the institutional arrangement making such a form

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<sup>1</sup> With the possible exceptions of Marcuse and Fromm, whose works did somehow anticipate alternative conditions of existence : the aesthetic form for the former, and a system where the individual actively “participates in the social process” in such a way as to make the “active and spontaneous realization of the self” possible, for the other. Fromm, E. (2002) *The Fear of Freedom*, London : Routledge, p 237. These insights have nevertheless been limited to somewhat vague theoretical considerations. For a more detailed discussion of Marcuse's aesthetic form see chapter three.

<sup>2</sup> See chapter three.

of emancipation possible as early as *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.<sup>3</sup> It could in fact be suggested that Habermas was the first member of the Frankfurt School to formulate a critical theory with a prescriptive content providing an insight into the broad institutional framework capable of actualising emancipation. Critical theory, he thought, should not only seek to identify the emancipatory potentialities inherent in modernity (communicative action), but must also seek to conceptualise the basic institutional framework and the various democratic processes through which they can be realised (the public sphere).

Guiding Habermas's project can be found the notion of control which, as a notion necessarily deriving from his concerns with moral autonomy, has significantly shaped the practical content of his critical theory. Key to such a content, in fact, is the view that human emancipation is only possible under *democratic control*. Here is how he briefly defined his conception of democracy:

We shall understand democracy to mean the institutionally secured forms of general and public communication that deal with the practical question of how men can and want to live under the objective conditions of their ever-expanding power of control.<sup>4</sup>

Whilst the development of the productive forces increases humanity's capacity for *technical* control, Habermas contends that it remains an *insufficient* condition for the emancipation of humanity from repression. Indeed as a sphere involving actions oriented towards the efficient *mastery* of external nature, it is thought to fall short of satisfying *all* human needs. Individuals must also be in a position to make decisions regarding the best course of action to follow in order to realise the *common good* or, as Habermas would put it, to answer questions of a *practical* nature. Alongside such a development, therefore, must be secured the institutionalisation of communicative channels through which the normative concerns related to matters regarding "how men can and want to live" are addressed. Furthermore, since the very idea of emancipation implies that individuals must be in a position to have control over decisions on matters regarding the common good, decision-making processes ought to assume a democratic

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<sup>3</sup> His qualified critique of the Bourgeois public sphere does indeed contain clear indications of a concern with the type of institution capable of serving the satisfaction of individuals' needs by providing them with an outlet for the generalisation of their interests through the public use of their reason. A more detailed analysis of his critique can be found in chapter four.

<sup>4</sup> Habermas, J. "Technical Progress and the Social Life-World" in Habermas, J. (1971) *Towards a Rational Society*, London: Heinemann, p 57

form. How, then, does Habermas expect the democratic decision-making processes to perform their emancipatory function alongside the sphere of material reproduction?

According to Habermas's own theoretical framework, the task facing humanity once it has reached a particular stage in the development of the productive forces, consists in reaching a consensus on "how men can and want to live."<sup>5</sup> This, in turn, entails that individuals must be in a position to make decisions regarding the *fate* of the technological advances achieved through the technical mastery of the forces of external nature. As such, the problem facing modern societies in their quest for complete human emancipation "can [...] be stated as one of the relation between technology and democracy: how can the power of technical control be brought within the range of the consensus of acting and transacting citizens."<sup>6</sup> The mastery of nature in the "system" therefore means that command can be replaced by consensus in the "lifeworld," but in order to prevent the repression of internal nature, the latter process ought to assume a democratic form. A society composed of individuals engaging in successful emancipatory practices, is one in which the democratic decision-making processes have brought technological achievements under the rational control of individuals engaging in communicative practices aimed at reaching a consensus, whose content consists in defining, intersubjectively, the "*right*" role for technology in the realisation of the common good. Thus, whilst new forms of technologies, such as contraceptive and transportation technologies, constantly develop, it is not until individuals voicing their interests through the various communicative channels available to them have established the *moral* significance of the role of such technologies, that one can begin to speak of human emancipation.<sup>7</sup> Practical matters such as the moral implications of the diffusion of, for example, abortive technologies and petrol-guzzling vehicles hold, according to Habermas, no place in a sphere where actions are governed by imperatives of efficiency and power. The epistemological content of practical questions instead corresponds to actions oriented towards the accomplishment of a rational consensus on the definition of the common good and, as such, *strictly* regard matters concerning social integration or, to put it differently, the emancipation of humanity's own nature. A society failing to accumulate enough socially integrative resources for the development

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<sup>5</sup> Here, one could suggest, lies both the link and break of Habermas's own critical theory with historical materialism.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p 57. This view is also expressed in other works such as *Knowledge and Human Interests* and *Legitimation Crisis*.

<sup>7</sup> Habermas's approach to emancipation may in this regard be defined in terms of moral autonomy.

of the communicative channels required for democratic decision-making processes would, consequently, fail to equip individuals with the means for human emancipation. A critical theory that can, however, does demand positive changes.

As a social form marking the “colonisation”<sup>8</sup> of the sphere of social integration – also known as the “lifeworld” – by systemic imperatives, the advanced stage of capitalist development effectively brought about a highly significant *democratic deficit*. Indeed, once manipulative relations governed by the principle of efficiency begin to interfere with matters of a practical nature, the latter *lose* their normative character, thereby causing a distortion in communication. As a “solution” to the problem of the spread of instrumental reason, Habermas proposes to harness the reflexive power of communicative reason by mobilising the already existing socially integrative resources and turning them into a buffer against the systemic imperatives. Individuals are expected to do so by seizing the various communicative channels at their disposal. A free form of communication, i.e. communication undistorted by the systemic imperatives, itself the precondition for truly democratic decisions, is therefore thought to be possible without altering the sphere of material reproduction, also known as the “system.” In contrast to Marcuse, then, Habermas believes autonomy to be realisable through democratic decision-making processes standing *alongside* a “technological rationality” yielded by the capitalist model of production. According to him it is “a question of setting in motion a politically effective discussion that rationally brings the social potential constituted by technical knowledge and ability into a defined and controlled relation to our practical knowledge and will.”<sup>9</sup> Habermas is in fact in a position to argue that human emancipation can coexist with “technological domination” as a result of his epistemological distinction between a technical-scientific and practical-normative sphere. However, as was shown in chapter four, this distinction rests on the fallacious assumption according to which the sphere of material reproduction is thought to exclude orientations of a normative nature. Whilst Habermas’s claim that one can either have the existing form of technology or no technology at all implied an entirely value-neutral status for the imperatives of efficiency and productivity, a revised interpretation of Marx’s historical materialist approach revealed the contrary. Once the role of the relations of production in the development of the productive forces and

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<sup>8</sup> See chapter four for a more detailed account of this phenomenon

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p 61

individual human nature has been acknowledged,<sup>10</sup> and the true origins of efficiency and productivity have been uncovered – as orientations traced back to a particular manner of organising social life, i.e. as matters concerning “how men can and want to live” – the distinction between the two spheres becomes untenable, for the so-called systemic imperatives immediately acquire a *political* and *cultural* form.

Having established the necessary political and cultural character of technology, the task of anticipating decision-making processes that can effectively lead to human emancipation becomes one directed at the nature of those practices located within the confines of material reproduction. The solution to the democratic deficit facing modern societies may consist in bringing technical control under the *direct* democratic control of a “political public,” such as the form found in Marx’s own communist vision. However, here is how Habermas responded to such a proposal:

[T]he reproduction of social life can be rationally planned as a process of producing use-values; society places this process under its technical control. The latter is exercised democratically in accordance with the will and insight of the associated individuals. Here Marx equates the practical insight of a political public with successful technical control. Meanwhile we have learned that even a well-functioning planning bureaucracy with scientific control of the production of goods and services is not a sufficient condition for realizing the associated material and intellectual productive forces in the interest of the enjoyment and freedom of an emancipated society. For Marx did not reckon with the possible emergence at every level of a discrepancy between scientific control of the material conditions of life and a democratic decision-making.<sup>11</sup>

Habermas’s objections are clear. Any attempt, such as Marx’s, to bring material reproduction under the rational control of a political public will inevitably lead to a significant democratic deficit. His reasons for thinking so are also clear. Since material reproduction and democratic decision-making are two spheres of activity corresponding to two distinct epistemological orientations, the direct control of production by a political public would necessarily entail the confusion of practical matters with those of a technical form, “as though appropriate means were being organized for the realization of goals that are either presupposed without discussion or clarified through

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<sup>10</sup> Habermas’s somewhat narrow emphasis on the productive forces in his interpretation of Marx’s materialism led him to ignore such a role. See the last section of chapter four for a more detailed critique of Habermas’s stance.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p 58



communication.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, the nature of production is such that any attempt to bring it under the direct rational control of “associated individuals” will necessarily lead to the formation of a society entirely governed by the imperatives of efficiency and productivity and, consequently, failing to provide the conditions required for human emancipation. According to Habermas, then, the democratic control of industry cannot but produce a society in which the communicative energies required for democratic decision-making are *stifled* by the heavily administered, and therefore repressive, character of its bureaucratic apparatus.<sup>13</sup>

Habermas’s objections do nevertheless rest once again on his problematic distinction between a logic of emancipation corresponding to the relationship between humanity and external nature (labour) and another corresponding to the relationship between humanity and internal nature (interaction). Habermas’s conception of a democratic control of industry fails to anticipate the possibility of a relationship between humanity and external nature governed by principles of a form different from those currently steering the sphere of labour. Such a conceptual blindness, it was argued, caused him to adopt a reductionist approach to labour.<sup>14</sup> Whether such a conceptual blindness was either a cause or an effect of his interpretation of Marx’s own concept of labour in strictly rational-instrumental terms falls outside the scope of the present task. What is nevertheless of notable interest here is the fact that *Marx himself* had envisaged a concept of labour reaching *beyond* the confines of instrumental reason by predicating it upon humanity’s recognition of itself *as a part of nature*,<sup>15</sup> whilst heavily criticising “centralized State power, with its ubiquitous organs of standing army, police, bureaucracy, clergy, and judicature,”<sup>16</sup> and praising instead “the emancipation of labour”<sup>17</sup> through the “self-government of the producers”<sup>18</sup> exemplified by the Paris Commune. It could therefore be suggested that the prospects of a non-instrumental rational control by producers depend upon the recognition of labour as a process

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> The weaknesses in the Soviet system, or the communist regimes of Mao’s China, North Korea, Cuba and Vietnam made such a view entirely plausible.

<sup>14</sup> See chapter four for a more detailed critique of Habermas’s account of the sphere of labour.

<sup>15</sup> As was shown in chapter one, such a concept of labour corresponds to the “implicit thesis” identified in Marx’s works. Since it referred to the emancipation of all faculties (cognitive and sensuous), it came to be called “labour as self-realisation.”

<sup>16</sup> Marx, K. *The Civil War in France* in McLellan, D. (2000) *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp 584-5

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p 589

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p 587. A planned economy, such as the form found under the Soviet system, would, in virtue of their heavily centralised nature, stifle the possibility for the creative and cooperative practices required for the actualisation of labour as self-realisation, thereby reducing labour to a merely instrumental form.

mediating both the transformation of humanity and nature, and upon the corresponding conceptual departure from the productivist model of labour characterising the capitalist and Soviet mode of production, for which Marx provided theoretical guidance. Thus, whilst it is true that he failed to “reckon” with the epistemological implications of his concept of labour as self-realisation and the institutional framework corresponding to it, segments of his works provided the conceptual tools with which the relationship between humanity and nature and, consequently, the direct control of industry by producers themselves, could be prevented from assuming a rational-instrumental form.

It was not until the publication of the works of Horkheimer and Adorno that epistemological considerations<sup>19</sup> of a non-instrumental relationship between humanity and nature potentially reconcilable with the concept of labour as self-realisation found in Marx’s works began to gain ground. Both members of the Frankfurt School, however, have made conscious efforts not to venture into the conceptual elaboration of the institutional framework corresponding to such a relationship, claiming that any such attempts would either be counterproductive or have pernicious effects.<sup>20</sup> They were nevertheless in agreement with the view according to which matters regarding the transformation of external nature bear a *direct* relevance to the emancipation of humanity’s own nature, and for this reason elaborated their critical theory on the more or less implicit assumption that an approach to human emancipation from the standpoint of the reconciliation of humanity and nature, in virtue of its requiring a creative form of activity mediating the former’s relationship with both the internal and external form of the latter, entails an autonomous control of those directly involved in such an activity. Horkheimer even went as far as suggesting that the “system of workers’ councils” corresponds to “the theoretical conception which [...] will show the new society its way.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, although they never made any thorough attempts to explore the alternative institutional framework, their conception of human emancipation – reconciliation of humanity and nature – along with their exploration of the

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<sup>19</sup> Both critical theorists’ critiques of instrumental reason were complemented by a defence of an aesthetic form of rationality thought to correspond to the reconciliation of humanity and nature.

<sup>20</sup> In his essay entitled “Traditional and Critical Theory” Horkheimer claimed that “any specific theoretical content must be constantly and ‘radically questioned,’ and the thinker must be constantly beginning anew.” Horkheimer, M. “Traditional and Critical Theory,” p 234. For this reason, the conceptual elaboration of an alternative institutional framework would constitute a meaningless exercise. The present thesis clearly contends otherwise. See the second section of chapter three for a presentation of Adorno’s own stance and my reasons for defending the inclusion of a theoretical exploration of an alternative institutional framework within critical theory.

<sup>21</sup> Horkheimer, M. “The Authoritarian State” in Arato, A. and Gebhardt, E. (1982) *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, New York: Continuum, p 104

epistemological implications of such a conception – aesthetic rationality – point towards the introduction of a “politically effective discussion” *in* and about labour.

If one combines both the view according to which the “*revolutionary movement negatively reflects the situation which it is attacking*,”<sup>22</sup> with an attempt to realise the promises of the principle of negativity,<sup>23</sup> one can begin to appreciate the compatibility of a conceptual elaboration of an alternative institutional framework with the general orientations of critical theory. Thus, if the aforementioned members of the Frankfurt School all agreed on the repressive character of the advanced capitalist bureaucratic apparatus, they must also share the view that any negative reflection on the situation they are attacking would seek to avoid reproducing the conditions leading to such a state of affairs. However, whilst they have all traced the origins of instrumental reason back to the presence of the principle of self-preservation, they shared different views regarding the place such a principle ought to hold in relation to human emancipation.<sup>24</sup> It has nevertheless been argued throughout the present work that, in agreement with the first generation of critical theorists, any attempt to rid society of its repressive character must presuppose the transcendence of “self-preservation,” even from the labour process. The autonomous control of industry, which their conception of human emancipation implicitly calls forth, must, in this sense, be stripped of all orientations towards forms of efficiency driven by private profit and systematic exploitation. As such, the negative reflection of the situation attacked by critical theorists, even by Habermas himself in his critique of Marx’s alleged communist vision, closely corresponds to the vision contained in the works of the guild socialist G.D.H. Cole:

The driving force behind the Guild Socialist movement is a profound belief that man was born for freedom – freedom that shall be full and complete. The bureaucrat, on the other hand, looks at life from the point of view of “efficiency.” What he desires is that the State shall arrange and manage the affairs of its citizens, whether industrial or political, with an eye to extracting the most that machine production can achieve. For him life must be organised by those above for the benefit of those below. His ideal is a bureaucracy masquerading as a democracy.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p 99

<sup>23</sup> In chapter three the principle of negativity was shown to be endowed with a positive force which only Marcuse wished to release, albeit in an incomplete form.

<sup>24</sup> Whereas Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse advocated the transcendence of self-preservation from society, Habermas insisted that all actions involved in the transformation of nature were necessarily governed by it, thereby defending its existence alongside human emancipation.

<sup>25</sup> Cole, G.D.H. and Mellor, W. (1918) *The Meaning of Industrial Freedom*, The Herald: London, p 25

Like the various members of the Frankfurt School – including Habermas – Cole opposed the principles underlying the bureaucratic machine to those upon which democracy is thought to flourish.<sup>26</sup> Although he is here referring to the heavily bureaucratised state-socialist alternative to capitalism, i.e. to a specific institutional model whereby economic affairs are directly managed by the state, a general opposition between orientations towards success and those towards “full and complete freedom” can be identified. As such, it could be suggested that his stance at least partly follows Habermas’s own, for both clearly attacked, and for somewhat similar reasons, the management of economic affairs by the state. However, instead of dismissing *all* forms of direct control in industry as necessarily repressive, and locating autonomy outside the sphere of material reproduction, Cole envisaged an institutional model whereby the “democratic principle” applies “not only or mainly to some special sphere of social action known as ‘politics,’ but to any and every form of social action, and, in especial, to industrial and economic fully as much as to political affairs.”<sup>27</sup>

*Contra* Habermas, then, and in *accordance* with the first generation of Frankfurt School theorists, Cole believed human emancipation to be predicated upon autonomy in labour. Indeed, since the “crowning indictment of capitalism,” he argued, “is that it destroys freedom and individuality in the worker, that it reduces man to a machine, and that it treats human beings as means to production instead of subordinating production to the well-being of the producer,” one can expect such problems to be solved “only by the workers asserting their freedom and proving their individuality, by their refusing to be regarded as machines, and by their determining to assume *the control of their own life and work*. [Italics added]”<sup>28</sup> In other words, as long as “industrial autocracy remains unchallenged,” society will fall short of meeting the conditions required for human emancipation.<sup>29</sup> By advocating a democratic control of industry, however, Cole is not merely defending a change in the nature of the decision-making processes found in the sphere of material reproduction, but is also calling forth a radical transformation of the relationship between humanity and nature. For the introduction of democracy in industry necessarily entails bidding farewell to instrumental efficiency and productivity.

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<sup>26</sup> Such an opposition could indeed be viewed as the politico-institutional equivalent to the opposition found in their critique of instrumental reason, and according to which the organisational principle of social life under self-preservation (instrumental efficiency) are thought to be opposed to those corresponding to actual human emancipation (freedom as autonomy). A clear affinity with Weber’s own critique of bureaucracy can also be observed here.

<sup>27</sup> Cole, G.D.H. (1980) *Guild Socialism Restated*, London: Transaction Books, p 12

<sup>28</sup> Cole, G.D.H. (1917) *Self-government in Industry*, London: G. Bell & Sons, p 23

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p 3

In sum, therefore, whereas Habermas called for a “*mastery*” of the “irrationality of domination,”<sup>30</sup> Cole – as well as the first generation of the Frankfurt School – advocated the latter’s *suppression*. The next section shall explore how Cole envisages the institutionalisation of democratic decision-making processes suitable for the realisation of the good life implied by the transformation he advocated.

### ***The Associative Model and the “Good Life”***

Whilst Cole was keen to expose and overcome the autocratic nature of the economic system of capitalist societies, he also made frequent and sustained attacks against the form of political organisation such forms of societies entail, namely the capitalist State. Indeed, like Marx<sup>31</sup> and the members of the Frankfurt School, Cole viewed the “present political machine [as] an organ of class domination,” and therefore sought to expose the illusory democratic character of the decision-making processes composing it.<sup>32</sup> Such a democratic deficit, he also argued, was compounded by the incapacity of the existing political machine to deal with the growing complexity of modern societies:

Men found themselves called upon to master the art not of governing the State as it was, but of prescribing for the government of a vast society which changed its basic structure so fast that the magnitude and growing complication of its problems outran hopelessly their capacity to learn the difficult art of collective control. Under the leadership of science things ran away with men, and the social mind was left groping further and further behind.<sup>33</sup>

The inadequacy of the modern state machinery, therefore, cannot be explained merely in terms of interests and class domination. One must indeed turn to the *institutional structure* of the political system supporting capitalist societies in order to

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<sup>30</sup> Habermas, J. “Technical Progress and the Social Life-World,” p 61

<sup>31</sup> It must be noted here that the affinity between Marx’s and Cole’s attacks on the capitalist state is not my own discovery. Such a case has already been made by Chris Wyatt in his doctoral thesis entitled “G.D.H. Cole: Emancipatory Politics and Organisational Democracy.” The general lines of such an argument can also be found in Darrow Schecter’s *Beyond Hegemony*. My own contribution to the debate, could therefore be said to consist in an attempt to reveal the triangular affinity between the early works of Marx, the Frankfurt School, and Cole’s libertarian socialism.

<sup>32</sup> Cole, G.D.H. *Guild Socialism Restated*, p 122

<sup>33</sup> Cole, G.D.H. “Democracy Face to Face with Hugeness” in Cole, G.D.H. (1950) *Essays in Social Theory*, London: Macmillan, p 91

grasp fully the causes of their democratic deficit. Cole, then, sought to warn us against the growing incapacity of the modern state to provide an outlet for “collective control.” The mode of representation at the basis of the state, namely “representative democracy,” has failed, he argued, to realise its emancipatory promises. Instead, and in virtue of the limited control it has been capable of yielding,<sup>34</sup> “representative democracy” has created a state of affairs where individuals “feel lonely in a great crowd unless there is someone to hustle them into herd activity,” thereby making them vulnerable to the influence or control of “the man with the loudest voice, or [...] the loudest loud-speaker and the most efficient propagandist technique.”<sup>35</sup> With an institutional structure and mode of representation incapable of accommodating the direct control required for “a society in which everyone has a chance to count as an individual, and to do something that is distinctively his own,”<sup>36</sup> Cole is eventually forced to dismiss the “omnicompetent State, with its omnicompetent Parliament, [as] utterly unsuitable to any really democratic community.”<sup>37</sup> For this reason, they “must be destroyed or painlessly extinguished.”<sup>38</sup>

What form, then, would an institutional structure and mode of representation suitable for a truly democratic society assume? If, according to Cole, a central problem with the existing political machine is, in virtue of its “hugeness” and distance from the day-to-day affairs of individuals, its incapacity to give adequate recognition to the particular and ever-changing needs of these same individuals, it must follow that the latter “can control great affairs only by acting together in the control of small affairs, and finding, through the experience of neighbourhood, men whom they can entrust with larger decisions than they can take rationally for themselves.”<sup>39</sup> For this reason, the institutional structure of the political sphere must be re-organised into “groups small enough to express the spirit of neighbourhood and personal acquaintance.”<sup>40</sup> In other

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<sup>34</sup> The two main problems Cole identified with the existing form of political representation are as follows: “The first is that the elector retains practically no control over his representative, has only the power to change him at very infrequent intervals, and has in fact only a very limited range of choice [...] The second is that the elector is called upon to choose one man to represent him in relation to every conceivable question that may come before Parliament, whereas, if he is a rational being, he always certainly agrees with one man about one thing and with another about another [...]” Cole, G.D.H. *Guild Socialism Restated*, pp 31-2

<sup>35</sup> Cole, G.D.H. “The Essentials of Democracy” in Cole, G.D.H. *Essays in Social Theory*, London: Macmillan, p 99

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p 99

<sup>37</sup> Cole, G.D.H. *Guild Socialism Restated*, p 32

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p 32

<sup>39</sup> Cole, G.D.H. “Democracy Face to Face with Hugeness,” pp 94-5

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, pp 94-5. Cole, therefore, defended a concept of need radically different from needs developing under a capitalist market based on private property. Indeed, whilst the capitalistic conception of need

words, according to Cole, the problems identified with the existing political life would best be overcome by re-organising it into various *associations*, whose *local* character would serve to maximise each member's control over the "larger decisions" requiring representation.

Above and beyond the local nature of associations, it is their very *raison d'être* that is instrumental to a key criterion when discussing democracy, namely the maximisation of communication. Since, as Cole further pointed out, the "consciousness of a want requiring co-operative action for its satisfaction is the basis of *association*,"<sup>41</sup> the latter effectively serves the direct purpose of giving its members "a chance to count as an individual, and to do something that is distinctively his own" in cooperation with others.<sup>42</sup> Members of each association are, in this sense, united by a common purpose originating from the "translat[ion] of their consciousness of wants into will."<sup>43</sup> Any political representation expected to maximise direct control over decision-making processes must, accordingly, be organised around the *purpose* of each association. However, whilst a re-organisation of the *political* machine's institutional structure and mode of representation constitutes a necessary step towards the formation of a truly democratic society, it remains, as has already been demonstrated, an insufficient one. As Cole argued:

[...] Society ought to be so organised as to afford the greatest possible opportunity for individual and collective self-expression to all its members, and [...] this involves and implies the extension of positive self-government *through all its parts* [Emphasis added].<sup>44</sup>

Cole, then, effectively sought to give life to liberal ideas on autonomy (the possible) without reproducing conditions of existence causing "individual self-expression" to develop into self-preservation (the actual). In order to achieve such a task, he argued, the sphere of *material reproduction* itself cannot be excluded from a re-organisation of its institutional structure into associations. The task, here, as Cole suggested, is to "reintroduce into industry the communal spirit" required for the creation

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causes the conflation of private property and liberty, Cole sought to undo such a conflation by emphasising the communal character of needs satisfaction.

<sup>41</sup> Cole, G.D.H. (1920) *Social Theory*, London: Methuen & Co., p 34

<sup>42</sup> It will be shown in the next chapter that this particular feature makes associations the most appropriate form of institution for the actualisation of the free gratification of one as the precondition of the free gratification of all.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p 33

<sup>44</sup> Cole, G.D.H. *Guild Socialism Restated*, p 13

of conditions favourable for “self-expression,” and therefore direct control.<sup>45</sup> With the market forces under the control of individuals organised into associations, and a mode of political representation aimed at defending the interests of the various members in each association, one can begin to catch a glimpse of the contours of an institutional framework capable of giving human emancipation in all the relevant aspects of social life its due. It could therefore be argued that Cole’s institutional framework provides a basis upon which the *fossé* between the actual and the possible, which the critical theory of the Frankfurt School insisted on analysing, can be overcome.

One is nevertheless justified in asking, here, how Cole expected the political sphere to relate to its economic counterpart? Or, to put it differently, how did Cole envisage the various associations to interact with one another in such a way as to form a coherent whole? In order to provide an answer, one ought to turn to the purpose of associations. As was discovered above, the members of each association are united by a common purpose which constitutes the purpose of the association itself. According to Cole, “[e]very such purpose or groups of purposes is the basis of the *function* of the association which has been called into being for its fulfilment.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, in virtue of its seeking to realise a specific purpose, every association is said to perform a particular function. The latter, which Cole also described as “the underlying principle of *social organisation*,”<sup>47</sup> shall therefore serve as a basis for the *political* representation of the interests of the various individuals organised into *economic* and *civic*<sup>48</sup> associations. Cole summed up the advantages of the principle of function as follows:

Due performance by each association of its social function [...] not only leads to smooth working and coherence in social organisation, but also removes the removable social hindrances to the “good life” of the individual. In short, function is the key not only to “social,” but also to communal and personal well-being.<sup>49</sup>

With an institutional framework composed of political, economic and civic associations, the principle of efficiency underpinning the various institutions composing

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p 46

<sup>46</sup> Cole, G.D.H. *Social Theory*, p 49

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p 48

<sup>48</sup> Cole did indeed propose to organise all domains of social life requiring an effective satisfaction of needs (whether economic – such as milk production – or civic – such as educational services) into associations or “guilds.” It will also be shown below that a differentiation of functions between economic associations themselves can, and indeed ought to, be identified for a truly democratic social life.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p 62



advanced capitalist societies and causing the spread of the “social hindrances” to the good life,<sup>50</sup> would be substituted with the principle of function whose general impact on the various domains of social life shall consist in providing a cohesive basis upon which “the creative, scientific and artistic impulses which capitalism suppresses or perverts” can flourish, “and to enable the now stifled civic spirit to work wonders in the regeneration of human taste and appreciation of the good things in life.”<sup>51</sup> Above all, then, and in virtue of their *localised*, *cooperative* and *functional* character, associations provide individuals with the organisational means to gain control over the various political, economic and civic processes currently in the hands of the state and the market, whilst ensuring that the *self-realisation* ensuing therefrom assumes a *socially cohesive* character. It could therefore be argued at this stage that Cole’s functional associative democracy could succeed where Habermas’s theory of communicative action had failed, namely by *aligning* the common good *with* the good life of each individual, and circumventing the conditions leading to the subsumption of the latter under the former.<sup>52</sup>

In order to grasp the full range of mechanisms making the aforementioned alignment possible, one ought to turn to one of Cole’s main inspirations, namely Rousseau’s social and political thought. What attracted Cole to Rousseau<sup>53</sup> was above all the latter’s concern with the riddle of the relationship between individual interests and the common good, which the French thinker claimed to have solved in his concept of the “general will.” Despite the now well-known problems associated with this famous concept,<sup>54</sup> it was the fact that “it put right at the heart of social thought the notion of *will*, rather than so passive a notion of ‘consent’ or so objectionable a notion as obedience of the subject to the commands of a superior” that led Cole to develop

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<sup>50</sup> Such “social hindrances” include phenomena such as competition, alienation, the division of labour, class inequalities, bureaucracy, the wage-system etc...

<sup>51</sup> Cole, G.D.H. *Guild Socialism Restated*, pp 115-6

<sup>52</sup> See chapter five for a more detailed account of such a subsumption. Although the project defended here seems somewhat speculative, critical theory effectively defends it by insisting on thinking the possible.

<sup>53</sup> Cole not only regularly referenced the French thinker’s works but also translated and introduced his “Discourse on the Origin of Inequality Among Men.”

<sup>54</sup> Habermas himself has charged Rousseau for failing to solve the above riddle: “Even Rousseau’s democratic conversion of the sovereignty of the prince into that of the people did not solve the dilemma. Public opinion was in principle opposed to arbitrariness and subject to the laws immanent in a public composed of critically debating persons in such a way that the property of being the supreme will, superior to all laws, which is to say sovereignty, could strictly speaking not be attributed to it at all.” Habermas, J. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p 82

such an admiration for Rousseau.<sup>55</sup> It was, as Cole himself put it, a “special kind of will” for the following reasons:

He [Rousseau] was insisting that men, whenever they form or connect themselves with any form of association for any active purpose, develop in relation to the association an attitude which looks to the general benefit of the association rather than their own individual benefit. This is not to say that they cease to think of their own individual advantage – only that there is, in their associative actions, an element, which may be stronger or weaker, of seeking the advantage of the whole association, or of all its members, as distinct from the element which seeks only personal advantage.<sup>56</sup>

Cole, therefore, was not effectively seeking to establish whether Rousseau has successfully solved the aforementioned riddle but was merely interested in the manner in which the latter sought to solve it. He discovered that by placing his emphasis on the notion of will in associative actions, Rousseau had been able to expose the mechanisms whereby one *actively* seeks to realise the purpose of the association (or common good). The development of this “attitude which looks to the general benefit of the association rather than their own individual benefit” could only be possible wherever individuals become conscious of the fact that the satisfaction of a want requires involvement in cooperative action for, under such conditions the association, although effectively embodying a will of a different kind to the will of each individual, turns the common good into an *extension* of the good life of each individual. An institutional framework making it possible for individuals to act *in accordance with their will* would, in this sense, create the conditions for the development of social solidarity into a sentiment and, ultimately, turn the common good (or purpose of each association) into a project which the members of associations could all actively and personally commit to. As such, social solidarity is experienced as a “strong impulsion”<sup>57</sup> or “primitive social

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<sup>55</sup> Cole, G.D.H. “Rousseau’s Political Theory,” in Cole, G.D.H. *Essays in Social Theory*, London: Macmillan, pp 113-4

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p 114. Whilst Cole, here, seeks to expose his view in relation to Rousseau, he has consistently attempted to show how associations can successfully solve the individual-society riddle. See, for example, Cole’s *Early Pamphlets and Assessments*, *The World of Labour*, and *Self-government in Industry*.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p 128

impulse that has been overlaid by bad institutions, but not destroyed,”<sup>58</sup> and whose release would be made possible by the associative model elaborated by Cole.<sup>59</sup>

It should now become clearer how and why the associative model elaborated by Cole could provide solutions to the problems identified with Habermas’s critical theory. The conceptual opposition between “reason ordering and will acting” which Habermas sought to solve in his theory of communicative action assumed the form of a translation of the latter into the former.<sup>60</sup> However, as has already been demonstrated,<sup>61</sup> because Habermas sought to do so by turning the common good into an absolute priority, the conversion inevitably turned into a subsumption of “will acting” under “reason ordering,” for it forced individuals to accept a project that fails to grow organically from their will, thereby forcing the sensuous dimension of social solidarity into retreat.<sup>62</sup> In sum, therefore, it could be argued that in order to create the conditions favourable for human emancipation, the institutional framework must be engineered in such a way as to allow “sentiment” to become “a force in the shaping of human affairs,” or, to use Habermas’s own terms, a force shaping decisions regarding “how men can and want to live.”<sup>63</sup> It is with this particular concern in mind that Cole sought to realise the good life in his associative model, a realisation that, according to him, cannot be limited to a re-organisation of the sphere of production, but should also be extended to consumption as well. The next section shall present his reasons for arguing so and further demonstrate why the practical content of critical theory ought to be revised in such a way as to give associations a central role to play in the realisation of human emancipation.

### *Production, Consumption and Dialogue*

Conceptualisations of alternative societal models aimed at overcoming the problems associated with the capitalist mode of production have, as a result of the

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p 129

<sup>59</sup> One can already appreciate here the central role associations could play in the project of reconciliation between humanity and internal nature. Such a role will be explored further in the next chapter.

<sup>60</sup> Habermas, J. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p 82

<sup>61</sup> See chapter five.

<sup>62</sup> Ferdinand Tönnies’ distinction between “natural” and “rational” will could be used here to distinguish actions guided by a personal concern with the needs of other individuals and actions performed on the basis of self-interested motives guided by (impersonal) contracts, respectively. Thus, it could be argued that, under the associative model, relations of a personal nature would flourish at the expense of merely contractual ones. See his work entitled *Community and Civil Society*.

<sup>63</sup> Cole, G.D.H. “Rousseau’s Political Theory,” p 128

predominance of orthodox Marxist perspectives, favoured and even prioritised the democratic control of production by workers. As Marx himself had discovered, private property and the wage-system that ensued therefrom have turned the act of labour, and therefore the labourer himself, into a means for the accumulation of capital, thereby causing the subservience of the vast majority of individuals composing society to the economic system.<sup>64</sup> Human emancipation, it was thought, could only be expected to flourish on a societal scale once the sphere of material reproduction has been re-organised in such a way as to rid the system of production of its alienating, exploitative, and generally oppressive character.<sup>65</sup> This is precisely why, in *The Civil War in France*, one can find Marx defending the “self-government of the producers” exemplified by the Paris Commune, but also the reason why conceptualisations of alternative societal models inspired by Marx’s works have placed such a strong emphasis on the radical re-organisation of the system of production.

However, whilst such visions of a truly emancipated society include detailed analyses of the relation between individuals and labour, they have tended to neglect the role of consumption in self-realisation, and to theorise it as a dimension of internal nature. Indeed, whereas, for example, Marx himself was conscious of the inhuman character of the process of satisfaction of needs,<sup>66</sup> he did not seek to present the sphere of consumption as one capable of developing its own repressive mechanisms, and therefore as one necessitating a distinct analytical emphasis. He therefore did not ask himself whether the individual would indeed succeed in finding the means for emancipation in consumption, for he believed it was sufficient to demonstrate that a failure to achieve self-realisation through labour would necessarily prevent society at large from acquiring the means to attain human emancipation. It could nevertheless be argued that by locating the crux of his critique of political economy in production, Marx effectively failed to anticipate the key role consumption would eventually come to play in the advanced stage of capitalist development. Indeed, not only has the latter sphere,

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<sup>64</sup> The financial crisis of 2008 serves as an illustration of the fact that such a subservience well and truly remains the case.

<sup>65</sup> Such a stance can be found in conceptualisations ranging from the state socialism of Lenin to the anarcho-communism of Mikhail Bakunin.

<sup>66</sup> Marx did indeed argue that as a result of the inhuman character of production, the consumer is prevented from experiencing the “enjoyment or use of [the producer’s] product [as] the direct enjoyment of realising that [the producer] had both satisfied a human need by [his] work and also objectified the human essence and therefore fashioned for another human being the object that met his need.” Marx, K. “Notes on James Mill,” in MacLellan, D. (2000) *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, p 132

as Habermas argued, become central to the production of value,<sup>67</sup> it has also, as the first generation of critical theorists demonstrated, come to perform a key function in repression.

When one engages with the works of Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse, one cannot but appreciate the significance and complexity of the repressive mechanisms a system like the “culture industry” relies on.<sup>68</sup> Under an age of “mass culture,” they argued, one ought to expose the conditions under which individuals “as producers *and* consumers” experience the principle of self-preservation brought about by the capitalist mode of production.<sup>69</sup> Under the pressure of a hostile and competitive environment yielding conditions of existence under which they can only be expected to “cope[...] most proficiently with the facts,”<sup>70</sup> individuals as producers are forced to abandon any hope for self-realisation in labour, and ultimately seek refuge in a sphere where they expect to find the “pleasure” and “comfort” denied in production by the principle of self-preservation. The latter, therefore, is said to engender a “longing for a ‘feeling on safe grounds’” which, combined with the search for pleasure, turns individuals as consumers into agents immediately responsive even to the most superficial and incomplete of instinctual releases.<sup>71</sup> They are, for this reason, most responsive to a system – such as the culture industry – relying precisely on those “psycho-dynamic” mechanisms making possible the *effortless* and *non-reflexive* experience of pleasure, i.e. a form of pleasure that is not experienced as a process of self-realisation involving both sensuous and cognitive faculties or a satisfaction that does not really satisfy. However, since such a system, by professing the attainment of pleasure *whilst* thriving on the feeling of insecurity generated by self-preservation and complying with the logic of efficient capital accumulation, effectively limits the experience of the consumers of

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<sup>67</sup> See his chapter entitled “Between Philosophy and Science: Marxism as Critique” in Habermas, J. *Theory and Practice*

<sup>68</sup> A great deal has been written about the culture industry since Adorno and Horkheimer first elaborated their critique in one of the chapters of their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Some of the secondary literature, such as Steinert’s *Culture Industry*, has attempted to expose the relevance of their critique to contemporary western societies. Others, such as Cook’s work entitled *The Culture Industry Revisited*, have even gone as far as seeking to reveal the liberating potential of such a phenomenon. One can also find a vast array of secondary literature merely seeking to explain the complex and sporadic ideas elaborated by Adorno and Horkheimer on the culture industry. Bernstein’s introduction to Adorno’s collection of essays entitled *The Culture Industry*, and Witkin’s *Adorno on Popular Culture* represent such attempts.

<sup>69</sup> Adorno, T.W.. Horkheimer, M. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p 120

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p 83

<sup>71</sup> Adorno, T.W. “How to Look at Television,” in Adorno, T.W. (1991) *Culture Industry*, London : Routledge, p 161

culture to one of “adjustment and unreflecting obedience,” it ultimately falls short of fulfilling its very own promises:<sup>72</sup>

The culture industry perpetually cheats its consumers of what it perpetually promises. The promissory note which, with its plots and staging, it draws on pleasure is endlessly prolonged; the promise, which is actually all the spectacle consists of, is illusory: all it actually confirms is that the real point will never be reached, that the diner must be satisfied with the menu.<sup>73</sup>

By restricting the consumers’ experience to the domains of “fun” and “entertainment,” the films, music and other cultural artefacts supplied by the culture industry become incapable of supplying the cultural forms making it possible for individuals to engage in sustained self-gratification, also known as the sublimation of instincts. Instead the culture industry tends “to ensnare the consumer as completely as possible and in order to engage him psycho-dynamically in the service of pre-meditated effects.”<sup>74</sup> Consequently:

The man with leisure has to accept what the culture manufacturers offer him. Kant’s formalism still expected a contribution from the individual, who was thought to relate the varied experiences of the senses to fundamental concepts; but industry robs the individual of this function. Its prime service to the customer is to do the schematizing for him. Kant said that there was a secret mechanism in the soul which prepared directly intuitions in such a way that they could be fitted into the system of pure reason. But today that secret has been deciphered. While the mechanism is to all appearances planned by those who serve up the data of experience, that is, by the culture industry, it is in fact forced upon the latter by the power of society, which remains irrational, however we may try to rationalize it; and this inescapable force is processed by commercial agencies so that they give an artificial impression of being in command. There is nothing left for the consumer to command. Producers have done it for him.<sup>75</sup>

Under the control of psycho-dynamic mechanisms aimed at attracting as wide an audience as possible,<sup>76</sup> drawing their manipulative force from the divorce between

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p 163

<sup>73</sup> Adorno, T.W. and Horkheimer, M. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p 139

<sup>74</sup> Adorno, T.W. “How to look at Television,” in Adorno, T.W. (1991) *The Culture Industry*, ed. J.M.Bernstein., London: Routledge, p 166

<sup>75</sup> Adorno, T.W. and Horkheimer, M. *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p 125

<sup>76</sup> Hence the phrase “popular culture”

reason and the senses,<sup>77</sup> and addressing themselves mainly to the latter, individuals effectively *lose control* over the release of their instinctual energies. However, since the “desublimation” of instinctual energies resulting therefrom means that individuals remain in a position to experience *instant* forms of gratification, they fail to call into question the hostile and manipulative environment surrounding them. In sum, therefore, whilst the pleasure the culture industry constantly promises in advertising campaigns and marketing strategies must under such circumstances remain an illusion, the control sought by individuals over the choices made in the sphere of consumption becomes no less illusory. Under the advanced stage of capitalist development, then, individuals fail to emancipate themselves not only as producers but *also* as consumers.

Once the central function played in repression by the psycho-dynamic mechanisms<sup>78</sup> found in the sphere of consumption has been exposed, it becomes the task of the critical theorist to explore the conditions under which such a sphere, along with material reproduction, can serve the realisation of the good life where each person develops their own vision that is no longer interpreted in terms of functional competence or success in capital accumulation. As such, any attempt to conceptualise an alternative institutional model aimed at creating the conditions favourable for emancipation must be directed at the two spheres. It is with such concerns in mind that Cole elaborated his associative model:

[T]he only way in which industry can be organised in the interests of the whole community is by a system in which the right of the producer to *control* production and that of the consumer to *control* consumption are recognised and established [Emphasis added].<sup>79</sup>

Whilst Cole was conscious of the fact that because the worker “does not find his job interesting or pleasurable [he] seeks his pleasure outside it, in his hours of leisure,”<sup>80</sup> he was clearly aware of the fact that “the decision of the character and use of the product is clearly a matter primarily for the user” and cannot therefore “remain in the hands of outsiders” such as the markets forces or, more concretely, the “commercial

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<sup>77</sup> It is on this separation that the psycho-dynamic mechanisms rely, for it allows them to stimulate a reason-free, and therefore unrestrained, release of instinctual energies. Instinctual energies are here therefore said to be desublimated.

<sup>78</sup> The influence of Freud on the earlier generation’s critique of the culture industry is here clearly visible.

<sup>79</sup> Cole, G.D.H. *Self-government in Industry*, p 281

<sup>80</sup> Cole, G.D.H. *The Case for Industrial Partnership*, London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd, p. 16

agencies.”<sup>81</sup> Thus, democratic control must be exercised in both production and consumption.

Cole’s concern with consumption could, at this point, be said to reveal a significant *affinity and complementarity* between his libertarian socialist institutional framework and the critical theory of the earlier generation of the Frankfurt School. Indeed, whilst Adorno and Horkheimer merely sought to reveal the mechanisms at work in the repression of individuals *qua* consumers, Cole provided the theoretical foundations upon which the emancipation of these individuals from repression could be conceptualised and translated into practice.<sup>82</sup> As such it could be suggested that, to put it in terms echoing the views of Frankfurt School thinkers, Cole effectively treated *consumption as a central dimension to the emancipation of internal nature* from the psycho-dynamic mechanisms causing individuals to experience repressive forms of desublimation. Such a concern for consumption, then, marks a significant departure from previous attempts to institutionalise emancipatory practice. By restricting the scope of its concerns to the conditions of existence experienced by individuals *qua* workers, the Marxist orthodoxy had locked itself into a somewhat narrowly defined and pernicious vision of a society where the invisible hand of the free market would be substituted with the all-too-visible and autocratic rule of planners, whose role would consist in the highly challenging task of satisfying the needs of society at large. Under such an institutional framework, individuals *qua* consumers would lose all control over the *definition of their needs*, thereby failing to find the conditions of existence required for autonomous self-realisation. The conceptual elaboration of an alternative vision aimed at turning human emancipation into a reality must, therefore, *also* give recognition to the role played by consumption in the realisation of the good life. Indeed, as Cole put it, “[i]f the good life is a blend of satisfactions achieved from consumption and satisfactions achieved from successful creation, the only answer [...] is that men themselves must decide collectively what blending of these elements they like best.”<sup>83</sup> One can further appreciate the relevance of such a sphere in self-realisation once the changing nature of the capitalist mode of production is accounted for. Indeed, as has

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<sup>81</sup> Cole, G.D.H. *Self-government in Industry*, pp 106-7

<sup>82</sup> The significance of Cole’s concern with consumption for the conceptualisation of a truly democratic and socialist institutional model has been emphasised by Wright in *G.D.H. Cole and Socialist Democracy*, Wyatt in his thesis entitled “G.D.H. Cole: Emancipatory Politics and Organisational Democracy” and Schecter in *Beyond Hegemony*. What I am attempting to achieve here, is to reveal the ways in which such an emphasis effectively provides a basis upon which the transformative potential of critical theory, along with Marx’s concept of labour as self-realisation, could be realised.

<sup>83</sup> Cole, G.D.H. “The Essentials of Democracy,” p 97



been demonstrated above, individuals have, as a result of the alienating nature of the wage-system and the division of labour, turned to the sphere of consumption for self-realisation. Thus, a reorganisation of consumption into democratic associations would not only give the role of consumption in self-realisation its due, it would also serve to overcome the more recent and increasingly complex forms of repression<sup>84</sup> found at the advanced stage of capitalist development, thereby allowing individuals *qua* consumers to exert control over the definition of their needs and opening up an horizon of possibilities for the sensuous objectivity of nature to be expressed in the definition of those needs.

One is nevertheless justified in asking, at this point, how individuals organised into such associations would come to harmonise their individual plans of action. In other words, whilst it may seem immediately clear why one individual can best be emancipated in an association, it remains difficult to grasp how human emancipation could be achieved cohesively on a societal scale. In order to answer such a question, one must first turn to the very *raison d'être* of an association. If, as Cole suggested, one enters into an association following the consciousness of a “want requiring co-operative action for its satisfaction,” one can immediately appreciate the continuity between the good life of the individual members and the good of the association as a whole. The purpose of each association, therefore, is pursued by its members as their own. However, in order to ensure the completion of the process of satisfaction of needs, the producers must be in a position to know the quantity and quality of goods and services to be supplied, and the consumers in a position to communicate their needs. With such a concern in mind, Cole envisaged the introduction of a *dialogue* between the various associations. Once associations of producers enter into a dialogue with the associations of consumers, the members of the respective associations would be in a position to defend the interest of the association as their own *and* “negotiate on equal terms.”<sup>85</sup> Dialogue would, as a result, turn the satisfaction of needs into a process capable of maximising “the freedom of the producer as well as the consumer.”<sup>86</sup> With the invisible hand of the free market replaced by a dialogical relationship between a supply side and a demand side organised into democratic associations of producers and consumers

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<sup>84</sup> In his work entitled *Culture Industry*, Steinert provided several contemporary examples serving to illustrate such repressive mechanisms. The Princess Diana phenomenon or Woody Allen films, he argued, are but a few examples of “the insulting diet of trash that seduces us with a false promise of pleasure that is never realized.” Steinert, H. (2003) *Culture Industry*, Cambridge: Polity Press, p 5

<sup>85</sup> Cole, G.D.H. *Self-government in Industry*, p 86

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, p 302

respectively, one gains an insight into the institutional framework in which the process of satisfaction of needs is *directly shaped* by decisions regarding “how men can and want to live.”

### *Concluding remarks*

The various members of the first generation of critical theorists, on the whole, agreed with each other regarding the *dependence* of the emancipation of internal nature upon the process whereby external nature is transformed. They have nevertheless fallen short of providing an *insight* into the institutional structure within which the new set of subject-object relations required for human emancipation could develop. As such, Habermas’s attempt to address the institutionalisation of the reconciliation of humanity and nature and to treat it as a matter *strictly* regarding the relationship between humanity and itself marks a significant departure from the earlier generation. What I have sought to achieve in this chapter is to reconcile the *prescriptive* character of Habermas’s critical theory with the approach to human emancipation defended by the first generation of critical theorists. In order to do so, I have attempted to expose the *elective affinity* between the associative model of democracy elaborated by G.D.H. Cole and the form of emancipatory practice defended by Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse, whilst revealing that the self-government of individuals consists in, as Marx himself put it, “the political form [...] under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour.”<sup>87</sup> In the following chapter, I shall further explore such an elective affinity by presenting Cole’s institutional framework as the most suitable one for the task of *reconciliation*.

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<sup>87</sup> Marx, K. *The Civil War in France*, p. 589

## **Chapter 7**

### The New Practical Content of Critical Social Theory

There are three levels on which the repressive character of advanced capitalism has been identified throughout the present work: the economic (labour), epistemic (knowledge) and political (communication).<sup>1</sup> All of these levels are, as it has already been shown, inter-connected. This chapter seeks to show how Cole's institutional framework can reconcile humanity and nature at each of these levels, and serve the development of a legitimate legal order.<sup>2</sup>

#### ***Reconciliation at the Level of Associative Action***

The first generation of Frankfurt School critical theorists are well known today for the strong emphasis they placed on culture and, more specifically art, in both their critique of the advanced stage of capitalist development and their approach to emancipation. It has been the contention of the present work to demonstrate the equally strong emphasis placed by the same generation upon the role played by humanity's transformation of external nature in repression. However, whereas Horkheimer identified the economy as the "first cause of wretchedness"<sup>3</sup> and, along with Adorno, presented work as "the active, practical basis, and thus the historically and logically prior form of domination,"<sup>4</sup> both tended to view culture and, more specifically, works of art as the potential loci of reconciliation of humanity and internal nature. At first glance,

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<sup>1</sup> One could here employ Wagner's own terminology, insofar as the three levels mentioned could also be described by what he called the three "*problématiques*" of modernity: the economic, the political, and the epistemic. See his work entitled *Modernity as Experience and Interpretation*.

<sup>2</sup> The attempt to explore the conditions required for a legitimate legal order is far from new. Max Weber and Carl Schmitt were among some of the first political theorists to undertake such a task. What I am nevertheless attempting to do here, is to explore the ways in which the critique of instrumental reason, combined with the libertarian socialism of G.D.H. Cole, can serve as a basis for the conceptualisation of a legitimate legal order. Such an attempt echoes Darro Schecter's view, according to which the critique of instrumental reason can serve as a basis for a critique of "instrumental legitimacy." See his work entitled *The Critique of Instrumental Reason from Weber to Habermas*.

<sup>3</sup> Horkheimer, M. "Traditional and Critical Theory," p 249

<sup>4</sup> Honneth, A. and Ash, M.G. "Work and Instrumental Action," *Journal of Critical Theory and Modernity*, No. 26, Spring-Summer 1982, p 44

then, the critical theories of Adorno and Horkheimer appear to dismiss work as a potential sphere of emancipatory practice. It has nevertheless been suggested in the previous chapters that since emancipatory practice cannot be located outside the framework of subject-object relations, the practical content of critical theory ought to be revised in such a way as to include explicit and direct concerns with the possible form of mediation for the reconciliation of humanity and *external* nature. Thus, whilst Adorno and Horkheimer sought to present reconciliation and the process thought to mediate it as matters primarily concerning *culture*, or the relationship between humanity and internal nature, it was argued that the inextricable tie between reconciliation *and* the transformation of external nature which they have consistently sought to uncover throughout their works<sup>5</sup> effectively exposed the process of satisfaction of needs itself to mimesis. As a result, any attempt to strip social relations of their repressive character ought to involve the transformation of *labour* into a mimetic process of mediation between subject and object or, in Marcuse's own words, aim for a "convergence of technology and art."<sup>6</sup>

How, then, can the institutional framework broadly outlined in the preceding chapter be expected to accommodate mimetic labour? If mimesis, as Adorno himself understood it, involves cultivating the aesthetic moment in *reflection*,<sup>7</sup> then its introduction into labour would turn the latter into the *activity* giving the aesthetic feeling its due. As such, production would become an activity whereby the spontaneity of the senses can be channelled into the process of satisfaction of needs and finally become one of the key contributory forces to the knowledge individuals have of their needs. Labour, here, would in fact consist in a *creative process of self-sublimation* inasmuch as its products would serve to confirm the essence – cognitive and sensuous – of the producers, whilst satisfying the needs of other individuals, i.e. other producers and the consumers themselves. However, before labour can be expected to assume such a form, the producers must be given enough scope for the release of their creative impulses. In other words, they must cease to produce under the pressures of efficiency and productivity, which have served to justify the most significant hindrances to creativity

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<sup>5</sup> Here is in fact the point of convergence between the earlier generation of Frankfurt School theorists and Marx, for despite approaching human emancipation from two contrasting standpoints – a critique of knowledge, i.e. the epistemological standpoint, for the former and a critique of political economy, i.e. the materialist standpoint, for the latter – both viewed the relationship between humanity and external nature as a determining factor for the relationship between humanity and itself.

<sup>6</sup> Marcuse, H. "The End of Utopia," p 68

<sup>7</sup> See chapter two for a more detailed account of mimesis.

under capitalism, namely the introduction and intensification of the division of labour as well as the autocratic and repressive character of production. Drawing his inspiration from the works of William Morris, Cole undertook the task of elaborating an institutional framework that would protect labour against such hindrances. In a lecture entitled “William Morris as a Socialist,” in which Cole expressed the full extent of his admiration for the English artist, he expressed his agreement with the view according to which modern production

had divorced the routine executant from the artist-designer, and had thus destroyed the opportunity for the craftsman to employ his creative impulses, converting what should have been joyous creative effort into mechanical toil and, in the process, depriving the detailed work of all real meaning.<sup>8</sup>

The separation of cognitive and sensuous faculties brought about by the capitalist division of labour, followed by the elevation of (instrumental) reason caused by a system of satisfaction of needs forcing individuals to “cope with the facts” have divided production into specialised designers and manual workers, depriving the latter of a *creative* engagement with the act of production and the former of an engagement with the *manual* dimension of production. As a result, most productive activities are turned into highly specialised and restrictive activities falling short of realising the essence of each individual. Under such conditions, the producer fails to identify with the product of labour, the labour process itself and fellow workers and, as a result, takes part in an activity deprived of “all real meaning.” As an alternative to this alienating model of production, Cole proposes to re-organise labour in such a way as to create conditions favourable for its conversion into a “joyous creative effort,” for he refuses “to contemplate working for any kind of society that does not put high among its objectives the restoration to man [...] of a chance to engage in friendly co-operation with others, in satisfying forms of creative work.”<sup>9</sup> Economic institutions must therefore allow the producers to enjoy sufficient freedom in, and control over, the productive process in order to be able to turn the reconciliation of sensuous experience and cognitive faculties into the basis for the interpretation and satisfaction of needs. One can therefore begin to appreciate more clearly why the cooperative and democratic

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<sup>8</sup> Cole, G.D.H. (1957) “William Morris as a Socialist,” London: William Morris Society, p 8

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p 17

character<sup>10</sup> of associations of producers such as those proposed by Cole would succeed in accommodating mimetic labour. Indeed, if the possibility for a widespread release of the aesthetic feeling in production depends on overcoming the division of labour and the autocratic form of management imposing it, then an environment in which the various agents involved in production can be given the chance to *understand*, through *deliberative* processes, the tasks undertaken by the functionally different parties and, in turn, exert *control* over the wide range of operations composing the labour process, would create conditions favourable for its realisation. Thus, although following Morris, Cole did not “mean to deny the existence of functional differences between architect and craftsman or between manager or technologist and manual worker,” the deliberative character of his associative model would enable “the former [...] to understand the practice of the operations they directed, and the latter [to] be given the largest practicable freedom in carrying out their work under the general directives imposed by the master plan.”<sup>11</sup> Associations would, in other words, provide enough scope for the diffusion of information required for the various producers to exert control over *both* the design and execution of the products of labour, thereby opening up a space for the creative self-sublimation implied by the reconciliation of reason and the senses.

Once in a position to confirm their essence on a cooperative basis, individuals *qua* producers can become conscious of the social utility of the products of labour. The latter, which are no less than the material form of the producer’s individuality, become “examples of the kind”<sup>12</sup> as each producer “practically and theoretically” makes “both his own and other species into his objects.”<sup>13</sup> As such, mimetic labour and its products would not only serve to confirm the particularity of each producer but the essence of the whole species as well. It follows that by engaging in labour on both a creative and cooperative basis and, consequently, interpreting in common the “implications of the technical demands placed upon [them],”<sup>14</sup> producers can begin to reflect on matters regarding “how men can and want to live.” Products would, in virtue of their being “examples of the kind,” acquire a *moral* significance.<sup>15</sup> After all, by becoming conscious of the fact that the objects created will not only meet their needs but the needs

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<sup>10</sup> See chapter six for a more detailed account of the nature of associations.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p 9

<sup>12</sup> Chitty, A. “The Early Marx on Needs,” p 24

<sup>13</sup> Marx, K. *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p 89

<sup>14</sup> Eyerman, R. and Shipway, D. “Habermas on Work and Culture,” p 563

<sup>15</sup> The moral character of a process of satisfaction of needs re-organised into associations of producers and consumers will be further explored in the last section of the present chapter.

of *other members* of the same species too, producers are directly confronted with these individuals' interpretations of the *good life*.<sup>16</sup> In other words, by consciously producing an object that will directly satisfy the needs of other individuals, each producer consciously produces the object that will serve the confirmation of the essence of other beings, and can therefore orient his/her action towards matters regarding how other individuals can and want to live. *Elements of the social utility* of new technologies, such as contraceptive and transportation technologies, would here be directly interpreted by the producers themselves, who become conscious of the place they hold in the conception of the good life of other producers. Attributing a key role to the process of satisfaction of needs in orientations towards the life in common is not to say, however, that economic factors ought to dominate political power. As Cole put it, since it "is undeniably true that, under the capitalist system, 'economic power precedes political power,'" it must be the goal of "the Guild Socialists to destroy this predominance of economic factors."<sup>17</sup> The idea of a life in common is, under Cole's framework, no longer abstracted from the sphere of activity, i.e. labour, which makes each individual a "species-being," nor does it fall prey to the repressive tendencies of money and power.<sup>18</sup> Instead, one witnesses the *recovery*, by the labour process itself, of its *socially integrative functions*, and the formation of a space in which the individual *qua* producer can "take the abstract citizen back into himself" and "recognize his own forces as social forces."<sup>19</sup> One can also appreciate, here, the inextricable tie between matters regarding the transformation of external nature and those regarding the life in common.

The relevance of Cole's institutional framework for a critical theory aimed at turning the satisfaction of needs into a means for the reconciliation of humanity with itself and external nature does not, however, merely rest on its capacity to turn labour into a process of creative self-sublimation. Fully conscious that under capitalism, the worker "does not find his job interesting or pleasurable and seeks his pleasure outside it, in his hours of leisure," Cole sought to tackle the new role played by the sphere of

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<sup>16</sup> The significance of such a model of production – which Marx called "human production" – and of the dialogue between associations of producers and consumers for what Habermas called "practical" orientations, will be discussed at length in the last section of the present chapter.

<sup>17</sup> Cole, G.D.H. *Guild Socialism Restated*, p 180

<sup>18</sup> Whilst the former state of affairs is symptomatic of the liberal phase of capitalist development, the latter corresponds to the stage of capitalist development under which the state re-appropriates "steering" functions. This advanced stage of capitalist development therefore marks a re-feudalisation of state and civil society with a smiling face.

<sup>19</sup> Marx, K. "On the Jewish Question," p 64. The next section shall further explore what such a state of affairs entails at the epistemological level.

consumption in self-realisation.<sup>20</sup> Drawing his inspiration, once again, from the works of Morris, he observed that the productivist and consumerist nature of the capitalist mode of production meant that “things [...] could give no pleasure to use any more than to make.”<sup>21</sup> With the constant drive towards consumption for its own sake and a repressive form of desublimation relying upon the endless manufacture of “false needs”<sup>22</sup> forced upon the consumers by the various commercial agencies, the former not only fail to experience the act of consumption as a *sustained* form of self-gratification, but effectively lose the capacity, as *atomised* agents vulnerable even to the most superficial of instinctual releases,<sup>23</sup> to exert control over the *definition* of such needs. As a result, the act of consumption deprives individuals of any meaningful engagement with the definition of their needs, and the objects thought to satisfy the latter. The prospects of emancipation consequently rest on a re-organisation of consumption in such a way to enable individuals *qua* consumers to turn the release of instinctual energies into both a *gratifying* and *collective* exercise. The transformation of consumption into a component of self-realisation here depends on the consumers’ capacity to define, in cooperation with one another, their needs in accordance with *both* their cognitive and sensuous faculties.<sup>24</sup> Sustained gratification, then, would be secured by their capacity to formulate their demand in accordance with the mimetically mediated interpretation of their individual needs. In this sense, they would find themselves in a position to identify directly with the products they have directly chosen to consume. It follows that since the “main function of the consumers’ organisation is to make articulate and definite the consumers’ needs and desires” their interests would best be served in associations.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, their democratic and cooperative character would not only provide the scope for its members to exert control over the definition of their needs, but also to bring the release of their instinctual energies under their own control. With an act of consumption assuming the form of a *collective process of self-gratification*, one therefore witnesses the development of a new relationship between individuals *qua* consumers and the products, where the latter finally enter the process of satisfaction of needs as objects directly serving the sustained gratification of its

<sup>20</sup> Cole, G.D.H. *The Case for Industrial Partnership*, p 16

<sup>21</sup> Cole, G.D.H. “William Morris as a Socialist,” p 4

<sup>22</sup> See Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man*

<sup>23</sup> See chapter six for a more detailed account of the repressive mechanisms in question.

<sup>24</sup> The idea of a counter-public sphere elaborated by Negt and Kluge in their *Public Sphere and Experience*, shares very similar features to this call for a transformation of consumption into a sphere of cooperative self-gratification.

<sup>25</sup> Cole, G.D.H. *Guild Socialism Restated*, pp 88-9



participants. The re-organisation of consumption into associations would also encourage the emergence of a new relationship between the consumers themselves, for rather than seeking to both define and meet their needs in isolation from each other, the goal they share as members of the same association means that they would collectively make “articulate and definite their needs and desires” by directly engaging with the conception of good life of others. Since the goal of an association can only be realised on the basis of the communicatively shared interpretation of needs of its members, the *effective demand* for, for example, new contraceptive and transportation technologies, is the result of collectively articulated views on the necessity and desirability for such products. Thus the act of consumption, like production, would encompass decisions regarding “how men can and want to live.”

Given the inseparability of the reconciliation of reason and the senses, and humanity’s relationship with external nature, one is now justified in asking exactly how associations could prevent the former from dominating the latter. Since the prospects of self-realisation rest on the re-organisation of production and consumption into associations of producers and consumers in which the imperatives of efficiency and productivity and, more generally, the elimination of the principle of self-preservation, are substituted with the imperatives of creative service and self-gratifying use – both corresponding to the principle of self-realisation – the reconciliation of humanity with itself depends on identical conditions to those favourable for the reconciliation of the former with external nature. For with both a process of satisfaction of needs stripped of the imperatives causing humanity to dominate nature, and their substitution with imperatives allowing the former to become conscious of itself as a part of nature, a space for the treatment of external nature as a *partner* in emancipation opens up. Associations of producers and consumers, therefore, play a key role in preventing the domination of the object by the subject at the level of both internal and external nature. The next section shall further explore the contribution of this institutional model to the project of reconciliation, but this time by assessing its role in the constitution of knowledge.

*Associations, Dialogue and the Constitution of Emancipatory Knowledge*

With the possibility of experiencing the satisfaction of needs as a process of self-sublimation and self-gratification, the separation of “art” and “technology” characterising the capitalist mode of production becomes obsolete. As the “material” division of labour is overcome and the cognitive faculties are reconciled with the sensuous ones, *artistic* creation finally acquires the status of *social* utility. Such a “convergence of technology and art,” therefore, reaches beyond the confines of the material realm of social life to become a source for change in the nature of thought itself. Indeed, as individuals no longer come to experience production and consumption as processes through which both reason seeks to bring natural inclinations under its control (production) and the instincts are repressively desublimated (consumption), but as processes whereby the labour of both reason and the senses are combined, the cartesian dualism of “understanding” and “reason” vanishes. In turn, a space for the reconciliation of subject and object in thought opens up.

As a phenomenon mediated by mimetic labour, the convergence of art and technology relies upon reason’s capacity to “assist and support nature.”<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, the conversion of the labour of the imagination into a socially useful force must depend upon the recovery, by reason itself, of its “spirit of humility.”<sup>27</sup> By ceasing to master, and now effectively channelling the plurality of sensuous experience into knowledge, reason equips the latter with the capacity to preserve the moment of the non-identity of subject and object in thought and, in turn, capture the rapidly changing character of aesthetic impulses. With the aforementioned convergence, then, one witnesses the substitution of a rationality of domination, also known as “technological rationality,” with a rationality of reconciliation, i.e. one capable of preserving the non-identical and situated symmetry between the particularity of the object and the conceptual universality of subjective forces. Here the spontaneity of human existence is said to be channelled into a productive force through its mimetically mediated relation with cognitive faculties, thereby turning the interpretation of needs into a constellation of reflexively determined thoughts that *remains open* to the fluctuations of sensuous experience. What, then, are the implications of this form of rationality – also known as aesthetic rationality in Adorno’s work – for the relationship between individuals and the

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<sup>26</sup> Horkheimer cited in Benhabib, S. et al. (1993) *On Max Horkheimer*, Baskerville: MIT Press, p 395

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p395

social reality encompassing them, and how can Cole's institutional model be expected to create the conditions for its development?

With the emergence of an institution such as the modern state, individuals have been "placed in a position in which they are called upon to take part in decisions which involve reasoning in generalizations which far transcend the limits of their practical knowledge and personal experience," thereby falling short of finding the means for the confirmation of their own essence in decision-making processes.<sup>28</sup> The heavily bureaucratised nature of political life and the resulting treatment of individuals' own affairs in terms of efficiency and productivity characterising advanced capitalism, have effectively led to the prioritisation of institutional management and cost-effectiveness schemes over the satisfaction of both the particular needs of individuals and the good of society at large. Unable to treat decision-making processes as outlets directly capable of accommodating their conceptions of the good life, individuals have been reduced to the status of abstract citizens. In contrast, and because of its capacity to preserve the moment of non-identity between subject and object, aesthetic rationality equips individuals with the reflexive means to affirm themselves in the world as beings with a unique cognitive and sensuous make-up. An institutional framework enabling each individual to "take the abstract citizen back into himself[herself]" must therefore be organised in such a way as to channel aesthetic rationality into the various decision-making processes he/she participates in. As such, institutions must be sufficiently democratic and small to be able to both *connect* the "individual man[/woman] in his[/her] empirical life" to the decision-making processes affecting the conditions under which individuals seek to confirm their essence, and maximise their *control* over such processes.<sup>29</sup> Thus, since individuals "can control great affairs only by acting together in the control of small affairs"<sup>30</sup> and finding the means "to count as an individual, and to do something that is distinctively [their] own,"<sup>31</sup> the introduction of aesthetic rationality into decision-making processes depends on a re-organisation of the economic and political realms into institutions small enough to be able to give cooperative action and the spontaneity of natural inclinations their due in social relations. As producers collectively interpret the technical demands placed upon them under the imperative of creative service (Cole's "guilds"), and consumers cooperate in the definition of their

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<sup>28</sup> Cole, G.D.H. "Democracy Face to Face with Hugeness," p 90

<sup>29</sup> Marx, K. "On the Jewish Question," p 64

<sup>30</sup> Cole, G.D.H. "Democracy Face to Face with Hugeness," pp 94-5

<sup>31</sup> Cole, G.D.H. "The Essentials of Democracy," p 99

needs under the guise of self-gratifying use (Cole's "consumer councils"), they end up in a position to communicate their individual conception of the good life, drawn from the mimetically mediated non-identical reconciliation of their cognitive and sensuous energies, to one another. They therefore also become capable of reflecting upon their own *conditions* of existence on the basis of such a reconciliation. However, in order to be capable of giving such a reflexivity its due, orientations towards matters regarding the life in common, i.e. practical orientations, must serve as an extension of each individual's will. This is precisely where the principle of function comes to play a part:

Each of us has in mind, whether we rationalise it or not, some conception of the sort of social life which is ultimately desirable. Our conceptions of the functions of particular associations are inevitably formed in the light of our ultimate conception of social value.<sup>32</sup>

With the purpose of each association forming the basis of its *function*, and each purpose consisting in an extension of the individual members' *will*, the functional re-organisation of political life endows the representatives of the various associations with the responsibility to accommodate the conception of the good life of others in their decisions, and generally act in accordance with the *aesthetic-rational reflexive activity* of individuals *qua* free producers and consumers. The "social value" of an association, or its function in social life, would, in this sense, stem from the aesthetic-rational definition of the good life of the members of the various associations, and underpin the dialogue between the representatives directly involved in political decision-making processes. In other words, the interpretation of the social utility (by producers) of, say, new contraceptive and transportation technologies, along with the articulation and definition of the demand for such technologies (by consumers) enter the dialogue as the content of negotiation, as *public opinion*. The successful re-organisation of decision-making processes into outlets through which the rationality of reconciliation underpinning the conception of the good life of each individual can be channelled, therefore, depends on the re-organisation of the institutional structure into *associations* of producers and consumers represented by *functionally* organised political associations. Such a re-organisation entails, in more concrete terms, the introduction of notions of creativity, self-gratification and personal commitment into decision-making processes. The Mondragon experience has shown that:

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<sup>32</sup> Cole, G.D.H. *Social Theory*, pp 54-55

in times of stringency when an orthodox firm would lay off workers or shut down, the members of a self-governing enterprise can decide to reduce wages, curtail their share of the surplus, if any, or even contribute additional capital funds, as at Mondragon, self-governing enterprises are likely to tap the creativity, energies, and loyalties of workers to an extent that stockholder-owned corporations probably never can, with profit-sharing schemes.<sup>33</sup>

Self-governing associations make it possible for individual producers (and consumers) to regard the interest of the community as an extension of *their own*, thereby opening up a space for decisions (cognition) made on the basis of instinctual impulses (aesthetics). As such, they are the most suitable institutional form for the transformation of “individual need into an aesthetic value with cognitive content.”<sup>34</sup>

Whilst channelling aesthetic rationality into decision-making processes is a fundamental prerequisite for the adequate representation of individuals’ interests in the political sphere and the control by these individuals of the conditions under which they seek to confirm the essence, the prospects of their emancipation do nevertheless also rest on yet another condition. Indeed, as beings with both cognitive and sensuous energies, individuals *continuously* develop new needs and desires, thereby constantly altering their conception of the good life. Once such new developments take place, a *discrepancy* between the existing state of affairs and the new interests they wish to fulfil unfolds, prompting a will to alter the status quo itself. For this reason, the individuals must be in a position to turn their *newly* defined conception of the good life into politically *effective* decisions. The demand for new contraceptive technologies, along with the interpretation of their social utility may indeed change at any time. Thus, the institutional framework must not only enable individuals to cultivate the aesthetic moment in reflection, but also create the conditions whereby it can be turned into the very fabric of *public opinion*. Since it has already been demonstrated above how Cole’s associative model can frame the development of aesthetic rationality, the present discussion shall focus on the manner in which this same model can serve the translation of sensuous and cognitive energies into a *subversive* form of public opinion.

If, as Adorno himself argued in relation to the artist’s reflexive engagement with autonomous works of art, a truly emancipatory form of reflexive activity consists in a

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<sup>33</sup> Dahl, R.A. (1985) *A Preface to Economic Democracy*, Cambridge: Polity Press, p 132

<sup>34</sup> Schecter, D. *Beyond Hegemony*, p 160

form of thought capable of giving a constitutive role to the object in knowledge,<sup>35</sup> then it follows that the institutional structure must be organised in such a way as to allow decision-making processes to capture the rapidly changing character of aesthetic impulses. What I take this to mean is that the institutional framework itself ought to become sufficiently flexible to give sensuous experience its due in decision-making processes. As such, political life ought to become immediately responsive to a public opinion composed of the reflexive orientations stemming from the affinity between subject and object characterising the new needs and desires individuals seek to satisfy. How then, can such a state of affairs be achieved?

As individuals organised into associations of producers mimetically and cooperatively *interpret* the demands placed upon them, and consumers collectively articulate and define the needs to be satisfied (the demand) in order to realise self-gratification, they are in a position to turn their conception of the good life into a matter of *public* significance. For, insofar as the needs are defined and satisfied on a cooperative basis, and become the purpose of the associations themselves, they are endowed with a public quality. Furthermore, since the completion of the process of the satisfaction of needs requires the two categories of associations to enter into a dialogue with each other, the needs of individuals acquire a public significance *beyond* associative action. Any change in the conception of the good life of each member of the association therefore *directly* enters the dialogue between producers and consumers, and as such, immediately becomes part of the public realm.

To become the fabric of public opinion, however, the new conceptions of the good life must have an impact on the decision-making processes determining the nature of the life in common. They must be *unified* in such a way as to become a subversive force. The dialogue confirms the public character of the needs and desires of individuals organised into associations, and provides both the *institutional flexibility* and *reflexive unity* required for the satiation of the rapidly changing character of aesthetic impulses, and their conversion into a coherent subversive force respectively. Whilst such a unity arises, *in nucleo*, from the newly emerging affinity between the particularity of sensuous objectivity and the conceptual universality unfolding in creative production and self-gratifying consumption, it can become a subversive force only once the members of the various associations are in a position to communicate it at the more

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<sup>35</sup> See chapter two for an exploration of the constitutive role of the object in emancipatory criticism.

*general* level of dialogue. Each member of the association shall, at this level, defend the good of the association as a whole. However, they shall do so without what Habermas himself problematically accomplished, namely the subsumption of the good life of each individual under the common good.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, since the purpose and function of each association consists in an extension of the good life of their members, the degree of generality attained by the subject-object affinity stemming from the associative level, and its representation at the dialogical level remain sufficiently particularised to give individual conceptions of the good life their due in dialogue. Any change in the individual conception of the good life taking place at the associative level, therefore, becomes a force capable of challenging the established order once it enters the dialogue composed of the representatives of each association.

One does not witness, here, a “conflation of bourgeois and *homme*” in the citizen, and the ensuing colonisation of public opinion by the imperatives of efficiency and productivity but, rather, a *conversion* of individuals’ wills, as consumers seeking self-gratification and producers seeking creative self expression, into *differentiated public wills* defended by representatives functionally organised into political associations in dialogue with one another. Studies on the self-governing enterprises of Mondragon have revealed that the alignment of the common good with individual conceptions of the good life could indeed succeed in turning decision-making processes into outlets whereby “economic plurality/difference has been celebrated.”<sup>37</sup> Political and economic decisions are neither conflated nor separated but *differentiated* and *complementary*. Furthermore, one cannot define the nature of such a political life in terms of “generalised particularism,” for, as the consequence of self-interested orientations and cause of temporary compromises this form of political resolution falls short of giving the cooperative character of associations their due and is in turn unable to strip the tension between the various conflicting interests from political decision-making. Nor can it be defined in terms of “democratic universalism,” for the constantly changing character of the aforementioned public opinion excludes any possibility for universalistic tendencies to gain the upper hand. One could, instead, speak of a public opinion assuming the form of a *pluralistic general will*, inasmuch as the will of the representatives, functionally organised into political associations, consists in a reflexive extension of the will of the various members of the associations of producers and

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<sup>36</sup> See chapter five for a more detailed account of this phenomenon.

<sup>37</sup> Gibson-Graham, J.K. (2006) *Postcapitalist Politics*, London: University of Minnesota Press, p 86

consumers and is, therefore, directly aligned with the changing – and, in this sense plural – character of aesthetic impulses of the represented parties.<sup>38</sup> The phenomenon identified by Adorno as negative thinking is effectively made possible by what Marx understood as the process whereby individuals take “the abstract citizen back into himself,” where the latter effectively consists in accomplishing an *affinity* between the particularity of *sensuous experience* (the empirical individual) and *reason* (the cognitive self) as a moment of non-identity between object and subject in thought which, in virtue of its capacity to accommodate the rapidly changing character of aesthetic impulses, can both serve to *reliquify* a reality previously congealed by reifying, totalising and absolutising tendencies of a sovereign subject, and be expected to turn the cooperatively defined conceptions of the good life into a *subversive public opinion*. In sum, Cole’s associative model does not turn will into ratio, but effectively reconciles both in political decision-making processes, thereby creating the conditions for the permanent “reliquification” of social reality.

Whilst the dialogical nature of the decision-making processes composing Cole’s associative model serves to convert the individual conceptions of the good life into a pluralistic form of public opinion and underpins the institutional flexibility required in order to accommodate the rapidly changing character of aesthetic impulses, such phenomena are significantly facilitated by the power of the represented to recall their representatives. Under existing forms of parliamentary democracies, decision-making processes take place on the assumption “that one man can ‘represent’ another or a number of others, and that his will can be treated as the democratic expression of their wills.”<sup>39</sup> However, as Cole pointed out, decision-making processes whereby the will of the represented only directly plays a part whenever the representatives themselves are elected remain insufficiently democratic. Representation, here, fails to give a voice to the immediate needs and desires of the represented. This is precisely what led Cole to conclude that “[n]o man can represent another man, and no man’s will can be treated as a substitute for, or representative of, the wills of others.”<sup>40</sup> Representation, therefore, ought to be re-organised in such a way as to align the decisions made by the representative with the cooperatively defined needs and desires of the represented.

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<sup>38</sup> The phrase “general will” is here being used to refer to Rousseau’s own political theory, according to which the will of an association “is, in Rousseau’s sense, ‘general’ in relation to the members of the association, but ‘particular’ in relation to the community as a whole.” Cole, G.D.H. “Rousseau’s Political Theory,” pp 51-2

<sup>39</sup> Cole, G.D.H. *Social Theory*, p 103

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, p 103



Whilst the functional representation of the various associations makes it possible for the representative to act “in relation to a quite narrow and clearly defined purpose or group of purposes which the association exists to fulfil,” it is the power of the represented to recall whenever they see fit those representing them that will safeguard decision-making processes against the elected person’s “pretension [...] of substituting his personality for those of his constituents.”<sup>41</sup> With such a *proximity* between the elected and their constituents, political decision-making processes effectively become directly aligned with the conscious needs and desires of the represented, i.e. with public opinion itself. Whilst the mimetically mediated affinity between subject and object turns the aesthetic moment of reflection into the very fabric of emancipatory criticism (subversive public opinion), the latter is turned into a politically effective mode of thought by the re-organisation of political life into associations in dialogue with one another and functionally represented by representatives whose own decisions, in virtue of their direct alignment with the constituents’ wills, can finally be treated as the democratic expression of these wills. Political life thus becomes a realm of reconciliation *sui generis*. In the next section, it shall be shown how subject-object relations can serve as a basis for the formation of a legitimate legal order.

### ***On the Role of Subject-Object Relations in the Formation of a Legitimate Legal order***

Habermas and Benhabib have addressed the issue of reconciliation as a matter regarding intersubjective relations, “outside,” so to speak, of the structures of instrumental reason, such as the economic and political-administrative power. Accordingly, they have sought to expose the limitations of subject-object relations in framing the normative basis of the legal order required for the complete realisation of human emancipation. However, as has already been demonstrated in chapter five, several problems associated with their normative approach render their defence of the intersubjective framework *unsustainable*. Indeed, not only have they failed to account for the *value-laden* character of the imperatives of efficiency and productivity and underestimated their encroaching power upon the relationship between humanity and its inner nature, they have also *dissolved* the particularity of human existence in the

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p 105

linguistic articulation of needs whilst *failing to anticipate* the possibility for non-manipulative subject-object relations. As such, it could be suggested that by failing to address the latter relations in normative terms and neglecting the objectivity of internal nature in subject-subject relations, they have ultimately failed to safeguard the normative dimension of social relations against the repressive tendencies of the instrumental form of rationality spreading under the advanced stage of capitalist development.<sup>42</sup> As an alternative approach, it was suggested that critical theory's normative axis ought to be grounded within the framework of subject-object relations, for it is precisely here that the resources required for the pursuit of matters regarding *how individuals can and want to live* – the good life – originally stem from. How, then, can the practical content of critical theory be revised in such a way as to give subject-object relations their due in the constitution of a legal order giving recognition to the plurality of conceptions of the good life, i.e. of a legitimate – and in the present context, emancipatory – legal order?

Firstly, participants in political decision-making processes must be in a position to orient themselves towards matters regarding how *other* individuals can and want to live. In order to do so, communication between the relevant agents must first be freed from all distortions – actual or potential – causing these same agents to engage in *conflictual* practices. Whilst Habermas and Benhabib restricted the possibility for such forms of *undistorted communication* to a framework of subject-subject relations lying outside subject-object relations, it has been argued that denying such a possibility to the latter framework poses a real problem for critical theory. Indeed, by rejecting the philosophy of consciousness as a suitable theoretical frame of reference for reconciliation, both social theorists problematically take for granted what is but a historically specific condition, namely the principle of self-preservation. As a result, they fail to grasp the *communicative*, and therefore *normative*, potential of work, and the specifically distorting nature of its capitalist form.<sup>43</sup> Once the distorting tendencies in the sphere of work have been traced back to the principle of self-preservation, it becomes possible to identify the social hindrances rendering such a sphere incapable of

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<sup>42</sup> See chapter five for a detailed critique of their approaches. One could in fact conclude that the social relations entailed by their theoretical framework effectively serve as an apology for the form social democracy emerging in the 70's and 80's.

<sup>43</sup> See Honneth, A. and Ash, M.G. "Work and Instrumental Action."

providing the communicative means for reconciliation.<sup>44</sup> The conception of individual need as an aesthetic value with cognitive content that such a reconciliation entails does not, therefore, imply a return to organic communities, for it seeks to give both reason and sensuous faculties their due in reflexivity. With the substitution of self-preservation by the principle of self-realisation, furthermore, one begins to discern the contours of a normative framework of action anchored in the sphere of work, and serving as a basis for the development of legitimate laws.

As argued above and in previous chapters, the transformation of subject-object relations into a non-manipulative framework of action rests on the conversion of the activities central to the satisfaction of needs into processes of self-realisation.<sup>45</sup> It was shown that whilst such conditions would be partly met by transforming the supply side into a process of *creative production* mediated by *mimetic labour*, a concern for non-repressive forms of consumption was also required. The latter, it was suggested, ought to be transformed in such a way as to allow individuals to experience *self-gratifying use*, which the *control* over their definition of needs presupposes. Thus, by re-organising the satisfaction of needs into associations whose actions are underpinned by the principles of creative production and self-gratifying use – the two principles corresponding to self-realisation in production and consumption respectively – one not only becomes capable of anticipating the treatment of nature (both internal and external) as a partner in emancipation, but also gains an insight into the institutional model capable of yielding the necessary control, by individuals, over the satisfaction of their needs, which self-realisation itself presupposes. Where, though, do normative orientations likely to form the basis of a legitimate legal order fit into such a model? In order to provide an answer, one ought to turn to the nature of the social relations yielded by associative action and *dialogical coordination*.

With the dissolution of the imperatives of efficiency and productivity in associative action, a change in the orientations of those taking part in the process of satisfaction of needs occurs. In a free market economy, milk producers, for example, are forced to seek the maximisation of surplus value. As such, the purpose of production is immediately governed by the need to turn their efforts into a profitable enterprise, thereby subsuming their own needs and those of the consumers under the search for

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<sup>44</sup> As mentioned in chapter six, the social hindrances include: competition, alienation, the division of labour, class inequalities, bureaucracy, the wage-system etc...

<sup>45</sup> Chapters four, five and six all more or less explicitly address this issue

capital accumulation. In a democratically organised association of milk producers in dialogue with a democratically organised association of milk consumers, however, the actions and decisions of the members of the former type of association are effectively oriented towards the cooperative satisfaction of a need which motivated them to combine with other milk producers, and towards the satisfaction of the collectively articulated demand of consumers communicated through dialogue. The re-organisation of the economy into associations of producers and consumers in dialogue with one another therefore entails a change in the purpose assigned to the satisfaction of needs itself or, more specifically, a change in the motivations of the various actors involved in the process. Now in a position to treat the satisfaction of needs of *other* members of the association as *their own*, whilst seeking to *coordinate* their actions *qua* producers and consumers in dialogue, individuals no longer seek to pursue their self-interest but, rather, begin to treat matters regarding how *other* individuals can and want to live as central to the transformation of external nature.<sup>46</sup> In order to fulfil the purpose of each association and successfully coordinate their needs at the level of dialogue, individuals must indeed become conscious of the conceptions of the good life of others, and consciously treat their realisation as an *integral part* of the satisfaction of their own needs. The *raison d'être* of associative action, namely the “consciousness of a want requiring co-operative action for its satisfaction,” coupled with the dialogue’s coordinating function, therefore, secure the *alignment* of the common good with the individual conceptions of the good life, and effectively turn the realisation of the latter into the *precondition* for the realisation of the former:

“[T]o give freedom by freedom is the universal law” of the “aesthetic state”; in a truly free civilization, “the will of the whole” fulfils itself only “through the nature of the individual.” Order is freedom only if it is founded on and sustained by the free gratification of the individuals.<sup>47</sup>

Under the guise of “technological rationality,” validity claims are assessed according to the *normative yardstick*<sup>48</sup> framed by the imperatives of *efficiency* and

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<sup>46</sup> Gibson-Graham’s depiction of the Mondragon self-governing enterprises as forming an “intentional community economy” giving life to an “economic being-in-common” provides a practical illustration of the form of communicative practices defended here. Gibson-Graham, J.K. *Postcapitalist Politics*, p 84

<sup>47</sup> Marcuse, H. *Eros and Civilization*, p 191

<sup>48</sup> In chapter four I sought to demonstrate, against Habermas’s own stance, the normative character of such imperatives.

*productivity*. Individuals, here, compete, to succeed in an environment rendered hostile by the pressure to preserve the self. As such, they come to treat other individuals and, more generally, their environment as *means* for, or *impediments* to, the satisfaction of their needs. However, as soon as supply and demand are brought under the control of individuals organised into associations of producers and consumers, and the aforementioned imperatives replaced by those of creative service and self-gratifying use, one gains an insight into an altogether *different* normative yardstick. No longer oriented towards the preservation of the self, and equipping individuals with the reflexive means to a) *affirm themselves* as social beings with a unique cognitive and sensuous make-up, b) view themselves as beings *belonging to nature*, and c) regard the realisation of the good life of *others* as an *integral part* to the realisation of their own, the “motives of greed [...] and fear” vanish to give way to those of *self-gratification* and *cooperation*. Under such a state of affairs, the validity of a claim is no longer judged according to the morally pernicious yardstick of *success*, but, instead, acquires legitimacy in virtue of its capacity to yield communicative practices capable of *aligning* the needs and desires of each individual with the common good. Since the “position of the individual [acts] as the source and sustaining spirit of every association,” and each member of the association comes to treat its purpose as their own, anyone seeking to satisfy one’s needs through associative action necessarily develops a strong *concern* with the well-being of the members they cooperate with in achieving their goals.<sup>49</sup> As the *competitive-individualist* ethos framing social relations under the principle of self-preservation vanishes, and individuals begin to experience, consciously, their satisfaction of needs as a process immediately contributing to the satisfaction of needs of others, a new set of social relations, this time framed by the ethos of *cooperative self-realisation*, emerges.<sup>50</sup> Under such circumstances, a reflexive space within which

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<sup>49</sup> Cole, G.D.H. *Social Theory*, p 191. In the elaboration of his institutional model Cole, in fact, drew a significant proportion of his inspiration from the guild system of the medieval age for precisely its capacity to induce the moral orientations causing individuals seeking to satisfy their needs to regard the well-being of others as central to their own: “a fundamental difference between mediaeval industry and industry to-day is that the former was imbued through and through with the spirit of free communal service, whereas this motive is almost wholly lacking in modern industrialism, and the attempt to replace it by the motives of greed on one side and fear on the other is manifestly breaking down. It is undoubtedly the case that, though there were sharp practices and profiteering in the Middle Ages, the Gildsman or the Gild that committed or sanctioned them did so in flat violation of moral principles which he or it had explicitly accepted as the basis of the industrial order, whereas to-day moral principles are regarded almost as intruders in the industrial sphere, and many forms of sharp practice and profiteering rank as the highest manifestations of commercial sagacity.” Cole, G.D.H. *Guild Socialism Restated*, pp 44-5

<sup>50</sup> Such an approach to the satisfaction of needs can, once again, be related to the idea of an “economic being-in-common” spelled out in Gibson-Graham’s chapter on the Mondragon self-governing enterprises.

individuals can begin to seek the primacy of the object previously denied by the repressive tendencies of a sovereign subject striving to preserve the self against other individuals and the forces of both internal and external nature, opens up. The new social relations do, in this sense, correspond to a state of affairs whereby the conscious knowledge of themselves as beings part of, but not reducible to, nature, safeguards their actions against orientations towards mastery and exploitation, and the corresponding development of a legal framework founded upon *power* and *inequality*.

So far, it has been possible to catch a glimpse of the form assumed by a system of satisfaction of needs comprising communicative practices serving as a basis for the formation of a legitimate legal order. In other words, a case was made for a framework of action mediated by labour and capable of attributing socially integrative functions to associative action. The task of establishing exactly how social norms can be expected to emerge from this new set of subject-object relations, and become the foundation of a legitimate legal order does nevertheless remain. I propose to undertake it by looking more closely at the form of freedom enjoyed by individuals organised into associations of producers and consumers. The “personal liberty” which Cole believes associations to be capable of yielding was summarised as follows:

It is simply the freedom of the individual to express without external hindrance his “personality” – his likes and dislikes, desires and aversions, hopes and fears, his sense of right and wrong, beauty and ugliness, and so on.<sup>51</sup>

In associations underpinned by the principle of creative service (production) and self-gratifying use (consumption) individuals do not merely seek to satisfy basic needs such as shelter and food, but are also in a position to affirm themselves as beings with a *unique* cognitive and sensuous make-up and express desires of both moral and affective quality. The *reflexive power of reason* is here being combined with the *subversive power of the senses* to yield conditions of existence whereby individuals express and seek to realise desires of both moral and affective quality as both producers and consumers. By assuming such a form, then, the satisfaction of needs *also* serves as an outlet for these individuals’ *identity formation*. What is meant here is that in their effort

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Other historical examples, such as the cooperative movement in central Italy or the self-government of Yugoslav workers, could also serve to illustrate it. The latter example was analysed by Loucks in his interesting article entitled “Workers’ Self-government in Yugoslav Industry.”

<sup>51</sup> Cole, G.D.H. *Social Theory*, p 184

to express and affirm a wide range of already existing tastes and preferences, they acquire the capacity to *reflect* on their own conditions of existence, thereby opening up an horizon of *new possibilities* for the further development of their identity.<sup>52</sup> How, then, can the reconciliation of humanity and nature at the individual level become the basis upon which the legal fabric of society can unfold, i.e. lead to a *reconciliation on a societal scale*?

Since the overall communicative character of the associative model has already been exposed above, the present discussion shall concentrate on the specific communicative practices involved in the translation of norms into laws. A set of practices of such kind can be observed on two levels: the *associative* and the *dialogical*. At the associative level, individuals democratically organised into associations of producers and consumers engage in deliberative processes aimed at securing the *cooperative* pursuit of the purpose of the association as a whole or, put differently, at *maintaining the alignment* of their individual needs and desires with the needs and desires of other members of the associations. As such they are already in a position to orient their own actions in such a way as to *accommodate* the conception of the good life of others in the satisfaction of their needs. As producers, they shall indeed seek to *harmonise* the various individual plans of action aimed at the creative deployment of their cognitive and sensuous energies in the *interpretation of the technical demands* placed upon them. As consumers, on the other hand, each member of the association shall seek to *interpret the needs and desires* that will secure self-gratifying use in cooperation with others, thereby *harmonising* the various conceptions of the good life comprised in the association. It is worth reiterating here, however, that the harmonisation of individual plans of action at the associative level is such that it does not effectively subsume the individual conceptions of the good life under the good of the association. Indeed, since, as it has already been shown, the “position of the individuals acts as the source and sustaining spirit of every association,” the pursuit of the purpose of each association directly serves the realisation of the good life of each member. For this reason, the purpose of the association is endowed with both a particular *and* universal quality. It is, as Cole himself put it in an essay on Rousseau’s

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<sup>52</sup> The dynamics of this “learning mechanism” have been explored by Piaget, who Habermas cites in the first volume of *The Theory of Communicative Action*: “If reciprocal actions between subject and object modify both, it is a fortiori evident that every reciprocal action between individual subjects mutually modifies them. Every social relation is thus a totality in itself which creates new properties while transforming the individual in his mental structure.” Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol I, p 69

political theory, “clearly a special kind of will, present to some extent in every citizen, but distinguished from the rest of the individual will of each citizen by a quality of generality.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, the purpose of each association encompasses both a sufficiently particular character to give the *individual conceptions* of the good life their due in political representation, and a sufficiently general one to underpin the *constitution of laws*.

The completion of the process of constitution of laws as reconciliation does nevertheless rest on the successful recognition of the plurality of needs in the harmonisation of individual plans of action on a societal scale. Under a process of satisfaction of needs underpinned by the principle of self-preservation and regulated by free market forces, individuals *compete* with one another in the pursuit of their *self-interest*. As such they seek to maximise their competitive advantage with, at best, a complete disregard for the life chances of other individuals. Orientations towards the life in common<sup>54</sup> assume, under such circumstances, a *conflictual* form, thereby becoming incapable of yielding the normative basis required for a *harmonisation* of individual plans of action at the legal level. Any successful attempt to realise the common good, here, would have to take place in an abstracted political sphere, where the tension between the general character of the former and the particularism of self-interested actions would ultimately be exposed and force each atomised individual to prioritise the common good over their individual conceptions of the good life. What is therefore required is a system of satisfaction of needs whereby individuals can treat the needs and desires of other individuals as an extension of their own. Whilst Benhabib clearly sought to conceptualise the conditions under which a *complementary reciprocity* between the needs, talents and capacities of individuals can be achieved, the framework of action used failed to safeguard critical theory against the *dissolution* of the concrete particularity of human existence. Her failure to distinguish the interpretation of needs from their linguistic articulation in orientations towards matters regarding how individuals can and want to live, caused by her efforts to locate complementary reciprocity *outside* subject-object relations, has led her to dissolve the concrete particularity of human existence in her search for the “situatedness of interpersonal

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<sup>53</sup> Cole, G.D.H. “Rousseau’s Political Theory,” pp 113-4

<sup>54</sup> One can here still speak of orientations towards in common, for, as was demonstrated in chapter four, competition and other forms of action arising from the imperatives of efficiency and productivity do embody normative elements. Their normative content, however, is insufficiently *cooperative* to be able to lead to a harmonisation of individual plans of action.



existence,” thereby falling short of creating the conditions required for the reconciliation of humanity with itself.<sup>55</sup> Under Cole’s institutional model, however, the representatives of associations of producers perform their actions in relation to the function of the association and orient them towards the provision of a creative *service*. As such, they must seek to coordinate their actions with the representatives of associations of consumers, whose role is to ensure that the represented experience self-gratifying *use*. In the case of a demand for, for example, additional bus routes by consumer councils, the representatives of associations responsible for public transportation services will inform consumer representatives of the limitations placed upon them by the technical demands such a request entails. The latter may offer alternative options (such as additional buses on, or the extension of, already existing routes) formulated in accordance with their current resources (labour power, machinery etc.) which would not directly match the original demand, but could serve to satisfy the needs of consumers nonetheless. Here, a complementary reciprocity between the needs of individuals *qua* producers and consumers stripped of the pressures of a free market would have ultimately been sought. As producers seeking to perform a creative service, then, individuals develop conceptions of how they can and want to live distinguishable from those of individuals seeking self-gratification in consumption. However, they are *not* irreconcilable, for the organisation of social life into activities oriented towards *service*, and others oriented towards *use*, opens up a space for complementary reciprocity. Furthermore, whilst the complementary reciprocity between the various conceptions of the good life is completed at the level of dialogue, between the various representatives, it effectively *encompasses* the concrete needs and desires of individuals as producers and consumers embodied in the function of the associations. One can therefore anticipate, here, the emergence of a framework of action capable of giving the concrete particularity of human existence its due in the actualisation of the situatedness of interpersonal existence required for a process of constitution of laws capable of giving the plurality of needs its due. One is nevertheless justified in asking, at this stage, what *form* a dialogical coordination capable of accomplishing the aforementioned state of affairs would assume. Such a concern is in fact central to a comprehensive understanding of the process of law formation developing within the proposed institutional model.

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<sup>55</sup> See chapter five for a more detailed critique of her framework of action.

Under the pressure exercised by public opinion, political decision-making processes which, under the institutional model defended here, assume the form of dialogical coordination, ought to be sufficiently flexible to give the plural and rapidly changing character of the needs and desires of individuals its due. Dialogical coordination *cannot*, in this sense, assume the form of rational consensus. For, on the one hand, in virtue of their emphasis on *similitude*, consensual orientations lead to a form of action *too passive* for an adequate recognition of individuals' *wills* in dialogical coordination. It also involves *too high a degree of universality* to give the spontaneity of natural inclinations its due in dialogue, for it implies too fixed and absolute a character to remain open to changes in individual conceptions of the good life. The various participants in the form of dialogical coordination defended here do not effectively set themselves the task of realising the common good, for which the *generalised particularism* attained through consensus would constitute the most appropriate form.<sup>56</sup> Instead their efforts are concentrated on the achievement of a complementary reciprocity between the different needs and desires of producers and consumers expressed as a "special kind of will" in the function of each association. Dialogical coordination, therefore, unfolds on the basis of individuals' *points of difference* rather than *in relation to their identity*. This is not to say that a unity between the various interests expressed in dialogue cannot be found, for without it, the legal foundation of the social order would not be possible. What is being suggested, instead, is that such a unity assumes the form of a *temporary affinity* between the various conceptions of the good life; a *non-identical moment* manifesting itself as a *constellation of wills*. This constellation is, more concretely, made up of orientations establishing the *moral role and significance* of, say, contraceptive and transportation technologies stemming from a *temporary affinity* between the demand articulated and defined by associations of consumers and the interpretation of this demand by producers. Thus, in a constellation one finds, in contrast with a rational consensus, a temporary affinity between the various moral orientations comprised in dialogue, and manifesting itself as a *situated* complementary reciprocity. The laws thereby constituted, in virtue of their *immediate relation* with the knowledge of empirical individuals, do not effectively mediate social relations *in abstraction* from the context of action in which these same individuals are engaged by, for example, sanctioning one conception of the good life and prohibiting

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<sup>56</sup> See chapter four for a critique of "generalised particularism."

another independently of the given situation, but rather draw their legitimacy from their capacity to give recognition to the *singularity of each situation in mediation*. As such, approaching the legal order from the standpoint of constellation, involves attributing an *ad'hoc* character to the laws themselves, for the affinity underlying them permanently remains *open* to the possibility of a configurational change triggered by the subversive force of what it is *not*, stemming from the aesthetic impulses. In a libertarian legal order such as this one, the common good is no longer said to comprise interests *shared* by individuals, which connects these same individuals in virtue of what they have *in common*, but rather refers to a *singular* configuration of wills, which are connected to one another in virtue of their *reciprocal complementarity*. The legitimacy of laws related to, for example, contraceptive or transportation technologies is here determined by the complementary reciprocity, i.e. affinity, between the demand articulated and defined by consumers and the interpretation of this demand by producers *at a particular time and place*.<sup>57</sup> As a constellation of wills, then, the system of rules mediating social relations, i.e. the laws, is stripped of the absolutising tendencies ensuing from a subject made sovereign by the imperatives of efficiency and productivity, thereby safeguarding the achievements of dialogical coordination against the dissolution of the particular. As a moment of *pluralist generalism* yielded by the dialogical coordination of functions, the legal framework becomes flexible enough to accommodate new individual plans of action manifesting themselves as a subversive force in public opinion. Norms, under such circumstances, can finally be expected to serve the constitution of laws capable of accommodating the spontaneity of natural inclinations, thus giving maximum scope to individuals for the control of their own conditions of existence.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

In this chapter I have sought to defend a revision of the practical content of critical theory by exposing the affinity between critical theory's approach to

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<sup>57</sup> In their study of the Mondragon community of self-governing enterprises, Bradley and Gelb observed that : "Workers may benefit from the absence of a formal framework for several reasons. By their nature, legalistic codes at national levels are insensitive to the needs of local groups. [...] Workers can press for more in unofficial, sequential, disputes than as an institutionalized component of the political system with broader responsibilities." Mondragon therefore serves to confirm both the possibility of, and desirability for, a form of pluralist generalism of the kind defended here. Bradley, K. and Gleb, A. (1983) *Cooperation at Work: The Mondragon Experience*, London: Heinemann, p 43

emancipation as reconciliation and the institutional framework elaborated by G.D.H. Cole. In order to shed light on the relevance of his libertarian socialism to critical theory, however, I had to proceed with a demonstration of the capacity of his institutional framework to actualise the reconciliation of humanity and nature (internal and external) at the *economic*, *epistemological* and *political* levels. It was therefore argued, firstly, that the *re-organisation of economic life into associations of producers and consumers* seeking to engage in creative service and self-gratifying use respectively, would effectively turn the satisfaction of needs into a process of self-realisation capable of performing socially integrative functions. Then, it was shown how *functional representation of individuals' wills* at the dialogical level could serve the translation of the aforementioned reconciliation into the fabric of emancipatory knowledge in the form of a subversive pluralistic public opinion. Finally, it was argued that the *dialogically coordinated complementary reciprocity* between creative service and self-gratifying use would, as decision-making processes ensuing in a constellation of wills, locate the process of *identity formation* at the centre of deliberative decision-making processes and assume a sufficiently *flexible and democratic* form to accommodate the rapidly and constantly changing character of the norms comprised in the pluralistic public opinion and turn them into the basis of a legitimate legal order. As an institutional model capable of turning the reflexive capacity of individuals affirming themselves as beings with a unique cognitive and sensuous make-up, Cole's libertarian socialism provides a framework of action whereby individuals could be in a position to *maximise their participation in the constitution of the rules regulating their life in common*. It is, therefore, an institutional model entirely suitable for a critical theory seeking to actualise human emancipation as the reconciliation of humanity and nature.

## **Conclusion**

### Socio-historicising the New Practical Content of Critical Theory

#### ***From Kant to Cole***

Building on the critique of political economy of Karl Marx, the critical theory of the Frankfurt School and the libertarian socialism of G.D.H. Cole, the task of the present work has revolved around the formulation of a social critique aimed at the institutionalisation of the reconciliation of humanity with both internal and external nature. To begin with, it was suggested that the first attempt to conceptualise autonomy as a matter regarding the relationship between humanity and nature could be traced back to the works of “modern” philosopher, Immanuel Kant. In the first chapter, the author did indeed seek to show that from Kant onwards, any attempt to conceptualise the form of knowledge capable of yielding autonomy became a problem of mediation between subjective faculties and the forces of nature (both internal and external). With Kant, then, such a relationship came to assume the form of a mediated unity of subject and object, manifesting itself as an asymmetry between cognitive and sensuous energies, with the former dominating the latter. As such, the modern age marked the advent of a form of autonomy understood as mastery. The problem with such a conception was exposed by the earlier generation of the Frankfurt School<sup>1</sup> – especially Adorno and Horkheimer – who argued that by approaching objective forces (instinctual impulses and the forces of external nature) as dangerous and requiring mastery, it effectively led to the repression of internal nature at both the epistemological and institutional levels. Autonomy, they thought, could not limit itself to a mere preservation of the self against external forces, for this would create conditions of existence restricting social practice to the hostility of actions oriented towards survival. Instead, it ought to be understood as the realisation of both cognitive and sensuous faculties. From Kant to Marx, Adorno argued, approaches to autonomy had failed to strip themselves of the reifying tendencies

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<sup>1</sup> It must be noted, however, that the problems associated with the instrumental mastery of nature had also been explored by thinkers such as Heidegger in *The Question Concerning Technology* and Arendt in *The Human Condition*.

of the sovereign subject. What is therefore required is an approach to autonomy presupposing the reconciliation of cognitive faculties with the sensuous ones.

Whilst the Marxian critique of political economy contained clear limitations, it was suggested that the earlier generation of critical theorists, especially Adorno, had failed to identify the emancipatory potential of Marx's concept of free labour.<sup>2</sup> A case was indeed made for the latter's capacity to grasp autonomy as the "open revelation of human faculties"<sup>3</sup> through labour, and where the term "human" encompasses both the subjective and objective dimensions of existence. It was therefore argued that such a conception of autonomy, although more implicitly stated than the instrumental mastery of nature in Marx's early works, could provide a conceptual basis for the mediation of subject and object required in reconciliation. Thus, by defending labour as self-realisation as the mediating agent of reconciliation, a first call for the revision of critical theory's practical content was made.

A second call for revision was suggested by attempting to defend Habermas's own task, namely the conceptualisation of the institutional arrangement capable of actualising reconciliation. Marcuse's reliance on both civic disobedience and a providential subject had led him to fall short of fulfilling the promises of the principle of negativity, i.e. of turning critical theory into a force capable of informing a form of political action oriented towards the institutionalisation of both emancipatory practice and the corresponding form of knowledge.<sup>4</sup> What was therefore suggested is a revision of the practical content of critical theory in such a way as to orient its subversive inclinations towards the implementation of a clearly identifiable set of institutions capable of creating the material and epistemological conditions for emancipation from the repressive conditions of existence brought about by the advanced stage of capitalist development. This was precisely what Habermas's own revision of critical theory partly sought to achieve. However, by treating reconciliation as a matter strictly regarding intersubjective relations mediated by language, and failing to strip communicative rationality of the sovereign subject's repressive tendencies, he effectively fell behind not only the earlier generation of critical theorists, but even Marx himself.<sup>5</sup> A third call for revision was then suggested, namely the conceptualisation of an alternative institutional model based on new subject-object relations, i.e. a form of mediation between humanity

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<sup>2</sup> See chapter two

<sup>3</sup> Marx, K. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p 102

<sup>4</sup> See chapter three

<sup>5</sup> See chapters four and five

and external nature accommodating orientations towards a life in common capable of actualising the “open revelation of human faculties.”

I then proceeded with an attempt to demonstrate how the foundations of the institutional framework elaborated by G.D.H. Cole could effectively serve to fulfil the promises of critical theory. Whilst the penultimate chapter of the present work sought to elucidate the elective affinity between his libertarian socialist model and critical theory, the final chapter attempted to show how a re-organisation of social, economic and political life into associations of producers and consumers coordinating their decisions and actions through dialogue, could serve the institutionalisation of emancipatory practice approached from the standpoint as reconciliation.

The present work can therefore be seen as an attempt to revive the radicalism of the earlier generation of Frankfurt School theorists, and reconcile it with the conceptual elaboration of an alternative set of socio-political institutions capable of actualising human emancipation initiated by Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. It was further attempted to show that aesthetic negation’s orientation towards the possible and the earlier generation’s concern with the relationship between humanity and nature as a matter regarding subject-object relations could be translated into a political form assigning Marx’s concept of labour as self-realisation the role of “transform[ing] individual need into an aesthetic value with cognitive content” and emancipating society from the repressive rule of instrumental reason.<sup>6</sup> Cole’s libertarian socialism, therefore, could be said to share orientations found in both Marx’s and the Frankfurt School’s work. Firstly, as the loci of production’s actualisation into a socially useful form of creative activity, Cole’s associations of producers would effectively give life to Marx’s concept of “free labour.” Secondly, Cole’s treatment of consumption as a dimension of internal nature and his call for its re-organisation into associations of consumers provides a basis upon which the culture industry, along with the “repressive desublimation” it causes, could be superseded by self-gratifying forms of use. Finally, whilst the dialogue between representatives of producer and consumer associations thought to be required for actual democratic control may, in virtue of its economic character, consist in a departure from Habermas’s stance, it provides a suitable basis for the development of communicative practices oriented towards the harmonisation of individual plans of action, which the second generation critical theorist has been keen to

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<sup>6</sup> Schechter, D. *Beyond Hegemony*, p 160

concretise. The project defended here, in sum, aims to give life to the realm of the possible unleashed by Marx's critique of political economy and the critical theory of the Frankfurt School.

Where, however, does such a project stand in the recent literature on modernity and capitalism, and the contemporary conditions of existence they seek to investigate? After all, a defence of the critique of instrumental reason of the earlier generation of Frankfurt School theorists against the more recent developments in critical theory raises concerns regarding the relevance of the present project to contemporary conditions of existence. As Wagner argued,<sup>7</sup> social theory cannot overlook the manner in which social reality is both experienced and interpreted by individuals making up this social reality, and as the narratives found in the recent literature on capitalism seem to converge towards the view of a new age or phase of social and economic development, the relationship between the present work and the so-called "new capitalism" cannot be ignored.

### ***"New Capitalism:" Overview of the Mainstream Literature***

The task of establishing the relationship between the present work and the recent literature on capitalism shall serve to assess the revised form of critical theory proposed here in the light of what are considered to be problems of a contemporary nature. Although the fact of providing an overview cannot do justice to both the breadth and precision of views and claims provided by the relevant authors, an identification of the general lines of argumentation should serve as a fair and sufficient indication of the types of issues and phenomena thought to characterise contemporary society in their works.

The recent literature on contemporary capitalism has tended to concentrate its attention on the various social, cultural, political implications of a change from an "industrial" age, to what is usually referred to as a post-fordist regime of capital accumulation thought to characterise contemporary capitalism in a "high," "late," or "liquid" phase of modernity. Giddens<sup>8</sup> and Beck<sup>9</sup> have, for example, sought to

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<sup>7</sup> See his work entitled *Modernity as Experience and Interpretation*.

<sup>8</sup> Giddens, A. (1991) *The Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press

<sup>9</sup> Beck, U. (1992) *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, London: Sage Publications



emphasise the partly destabilising effects of the decline of traditional forms of social integration caused by the increasing prominence of “danger” and “risk” emanating from a previously unknown rate of “techno-economic development.”<sup>10</sup> Other authors, such as Sennett,<sup>11</sup> Boltanski and Chiapello,<sup>12</sup> and Harvey,<sup>13</sup> have concentrated a great deal of their attention on the flexible nature of the new regime of capital accumulation characterising the post-fordist era, as well as on its effects on both individuals and the wider social, political and cultural realms. They have concluded, in a more or less similar vein to Beck and Giddens, that such new developments have effectively led to the emergence of a world characterised, at least in appearance, by what Harvey himself described as “the new, the fleeting, the ephemeral, the fugitive, and the contingent.”<sup>14</sup> From the point of view of the individuals making up the social world, then, one could agree, as Bauman<sup>15</sup> did, that the apparent instability characterising the “liquid” phase of modernity has led them to develop a longing for security.<sup>16</sup>

The various narratives found in the aforementioned mainstream literature on contemporary capitalism all tend to share common concerns regarding the human condition, now thought to be characterised by an overwhelming sense of insecurity and uncertainty, caused by a social world increasingly exposed to remote and unreachable systemic structures underpinned by a flexible regime of accumulation and the unpredictable development of productive forces. As such, the “new” capitalism is contrasted with its predecessor, whose heavily bureaucratised institutions and regulated markets are thought to underpin an age of “solidity” causing a longing for freedom,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p 20

<sup>11</sup> Sennett, R. (1998) *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*, London: W.W. Norton; Sennett, R. (2006) *The Culture of the New Capitalism*, New Haven: Yale University Press

<sup>12</sup> Boltanski, L. and Chiapello, E. (1999) *Le Nouvel Esprit du Capitalisme*, Paris: Gallimard

<sup>13</sup> Harvey, D. (1990) *The Condition of Postmodernity : An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p 171

<sup>15</sup> Bauman, Z. (2000) *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press

<sup>16</sup> It must be noted here that whilst the mainstream literature more or less tends to treat the instability and uncertainty of the social reality as *factual*, Mark Neocleous and Kevin Doogan have sought to expose the *manufactured* character of such features. In his *Critique of Security*, Neocleous described security “as a mode of governing, a political technology through which individuals, groups, classes, and, ultimately, modern capital is reshaped and reordered.” Neocleous, M. (2008) *Critique of Security*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p 4. Doogan pursued a similar line of argumentation by defending the view according to which “job insecurity might be usefully reconceptualized as a broader social insecurity arising out of the representation of globalization and the restructuring of welfare regimes, rather than an outcome of technological innovation and job obsolescence.” Doogan, K. (2009) *New Capitalism? The transformation of work*, Cambridge: Polity Press, p 10. The task of establishing whether the instability and uncertainty of the contemporary social world is ideological or actual falls outside the scope of the present work. What shall remain significant, however, is the predominance of the discourse on security in the interpretation that individuals have of their own experiences.

autonomy, and creativity in individuals. One is therefore justified in asking, here, what exactly the implications of this change from a previously prominent *longing for freedom* to a recently widespread *longing for security* are for the revision proposed in the present work

### ***Critical Theory and the “New Capitalism”***

The critique of instrumental reason elaborated by the earlier generation of Frankfurt School thinkers was, above all, aimed at uncovering the conditions of existence which have suspended the emancipatory potential of reason, and turned the latter into an instrument of repression. The principle of self-preservation underpinning modern societies, they argued, created conditions of existence of such a hostile nature that reason rapidly came to be associated with an instrument for the preservation of the self against external forces.<sup>17</sup> In virtue of its manifestation as a form of self-defence, then, the modern conception of autonomy has, from its inception, effectively subsumed liberty under security. As such, one could argue that it also presupposes the perception of the social reality as an insecure realm, and in which the demands for security cause those for liberty to recede into the background. Furthermore, by serving the mastery of both internal and external nature, perceived as the sources of the aforementioned “external forces,” reason effectively turned itself against the spontaneity of human existence, thereby turning “relations of men and historical forces” into “relations of things and ‘natural’ laws.”<sup>18</sup> As structures increasingly appear remote and unreachable,<sup>19</sup> and the aggressive mastery of nature becomes increasingly questioned,<sup>20</sup> the need for social critique to rethink the relationship not only between humanity and nature, but also between individual and society, becomes a pressing matter. For if

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<sup>17</sup> As Neocleous pointed out, the sense of insecurity yielded by modern conditions of existence had already been identified by Marx, in *The Communist Manifesto*: “The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society [...] Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones.” Marx cited in Neocleous, M. (2008) *Critique of Security*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p 28.

<sup>18</sup> Marcuse, H. *Reason and Revolution*, p 112

<sup>19</sup> Financial crises (such as the one taking place in 2008) play a significant role in revealing how an institution created by individuals themselves – such as the financial market – can eventually acquire a life of its own.

<sup>20</sup> See the introduction for a selection of sociological works addressing such issues.

critical theory is to be expected to serve as a means to overcome the insecurity yielded by the principle of self-preservation, it must be capable of confronting it with a socio-political model in which the dialectical relationship between humanity and nature is re-articulated into one whereby individuals can finally be expected to liberate *both* the sensuous and cognitive dimensions of internal nature, whilst treating external nature as a partner in emancipation. For it has been shown, throughout the present work, that a sociological understanding of human emancipation – as opposed to a merely psychological or intersubjective one – effectively depends on recognising the dialectical relation between internal and external nature.

Critique's general failure to provide an answer to what Wagner called the "political *problématique*" of modernity partly contributed, he argued, to the rise of individualism in the years following the events of 1968.<sup>21</sup> Its incapacity to anticipate an alternative "life in common" in the face of the "de-collectivizing" implied by the dismantling of what is usually referred to as "organised modernity" or "organised capitalism," meant that critique "contained individualization as a *possible* outcome."<sup>22</sup> As such it could be argued that, in virtue of its "failure to construct a viable political form," critique effectively paved the way for the development of demands for security characterising the period following the events of 1968. Although Boltanski and Chiapello approached the problems associated with the theoretical orientations guiding the latter social uprisings from a different standpoint, they drew similar conclusions. According to them, the failure of the events of 1968 ought to be attributed to a failure to combine the demands of both "social" and "artistic" critiques. Whilst the demands for authenticity, autonomy and creativity characteristic of the latter form of critique had been successful in freeing individuals from the bureaucratic constraints of organised capitalism, their divorce from the demands for equality and solidarity characteristic of social critique has led to the emergence of a "connexionist world" both only capable of translating the demands of the artistic critique into flexibility, and inducing a sense of precariousness into social life.<sup>23</sup>

Socio-historical experience in advanced capitalist societies has also shown that social critique's success depends on exposing the subsumption of liberty under security in autonomy, and ensuring that the demands for the former are no longer obscured by

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<sup>21</sup> Wagner, P. *Modernity as Experience and Interpretation*, p 71

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p 71

<sup>23</sup> Boltanski, L. and Chiapello, E. *Le Nouvel Esprit du Capitalisme*

the demands by the latter. Such a task can be achieved by exposing the incompatibility of the principle of self-preservation underpinning the conditions of existence under the capitalist mode of production with human emancipation. Since capital accumulation thrives on insecurity,<sup>24</sup> economic security becomes a priority; without it, “liberty is meaningless.”<sup>25</sup> Insecurity, therefore ought to be conceptualised in terms of an incapacity for individuals to emancipate themselves from the repressive mechanisms flourishing under the aggressive mastery of nature caused by the principle of self-preservation. Social critique must, in this sense, seek to “take[...] us beyond the narrow horizon of bourgeois security”<sup>26</sup> The task of ensuring that the demands for autonomy translate into demands for liberty therefore depends on the formulation a social critique presenting capitalism *as an hindrance to liberty – or fundamental cause for the repression of internal nature – rather than as an hindrance to security*, and opposing it to an institutional model capable of yielding human emancipation. In sum, critical theory ought be revised in such a way as to a) include a viable political form that b) succeeds in combining the orientations characterising both social and artistic critiques and c) translating the demands for control into demands for human emancipation. How, then, can the new practical content of critical theory elaborated in the present work accomplish such a task?

In order to provide an answer, a slightly more detailed account of the two forms of critique identified by Boltanski and Chiapello shall first be provided. On the one hand, based on objections of a moral nature inspired by socialists and marxists, the social critique seeks to tackle the causes of inequalities, exploitation and social fragmentation. On the other, based on objections of an aesthetic nature inspired by the “bohemian lifestyle,” the artistic critique attacks the causes of the loss of authenticity, meaning, and creative autonomy. Both critiques, therefore, “are not immediately compatible.”<sup>27</sup> In order to be able to conceptualise an alternative life in common successfully combining the demands of the two critiques, one must therefore seek to identify the conditions of existence connecting the sources of the phenomena at which their attacks are directed.

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<sup>24</sup> See Marx’s *The Communist Manifesto* and Neocleous’s *Critique of Security*.

<sup>25</sup> Neocleous, M. *The Critique of Security*, p 83

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p 186

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p 84. Please note that this is my own translation of: “ne sont pas immédiatement compatibles” found in the original version of the text.

Such sources have, in fact, already been identified by the earlier generation of the Frankfurt School. Their consistent attack on the instrumental mastery of both internal and external nature, although primarily aimed at uncovering the conditions suppressing authenticity, meaning and creative autonomy, could indeed provide the theoretical foundations upon which demands for equality, solidarity and security can be combined with those for emancipation.<sup>28</sup> By tracing the hostile character of existing conditions of existence to a subject made sovereign by the principle of self-preservation, seeking to repress the spontaneity of objective existence, and creating conditions whereby social reality has come to appear as “relations of things and ‘natural’ laws” – also known as the phenomenon of reification – critical theory effectively opened itself up to the challenge of anticipating a life in common where reality can finally appear as “relations of men and historical forces,” i.e. where humanity can be reconciled with both external nature and itself. The earlier generation of Frankfurt School theorists, however, did not seek to take on this challenge. It has indeed fallen short of employing its theoretical tools for the elaboration of the socio-political form corresponding to a world in which individuals could become capable, on a daily basis, to engage cooperatively with “the task of mastering reality as self-conscious practice.”<sup>29</sup>

It was Habermas who first undertook the task of conceptualising a life in common in which some of the demands of both critiques would be met. His “theory of communicative action” effectively sought to combine orientations towards both justice *and* autonomy. However, it was shown that by locating issues regarding the life in common outside the framework of subject-object relations, he had failed to tackle the root source of the phenomenon – reification – underpinning the problems identified by the two forms of critique, namely manipulative subject-object relations.<sup>30</sup> The task of anticipating the right life in common thus becomes, at this point, one directed at the reconciliation of the subject with the object.

The present revision, deeply indebted to the work of prominent figures in the more or less recent debate on the contemporary relevance of libertarian socialism,<sup>31</sup> has indeed aimed at elaborating the theoretical foundations for the institutionalisation of a form of self-conscious practice meeting the demands for authenticity, meaning,

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<sup>28</sup> The adoption of Marx’s concept of “human production,” also known as free labour or labour as self-realisation, has indeed partly served to give the demands of the social critique their due.

<sup>29</sup> Marcuse, H. *Reason and Revolution*, p 110

<sup>30</sup> See chapters four and five.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, the works of Chris Wyatt and Darrow Schecter.

autonomy, equality, solidarity, and approached from the standpoint of the socially and historically mediated reconciliation of humanity and nature, inspired by Marx and the Frankfurt School. More specifically, such a task involved the elaboration of an institutional framework capable of a) giving the spontaneity of objective existence its due in social practice and political decision-making – meeting the demands for authenticity, meaning and creativity, b) giving individuals control over their conditions of existence – meeting the demands for autonomy, c) aligning the common good with individual conceptions of the good life – meeting the demands for solidarity and equality. It was shown that the achievement of such a state of affairs effectively presupposes the substitution of the principle of self-preservation with the principle of self-realisation, inspired by Marx's own concept of free labour. In institutional terms, such a substitution would involve a re-organisation of social, economic and political life into associations of producers and consumers in dialogue with one another. Under such circumstances, imperatives of efficiency and productivity would effectively vanish to be replaced by imperatives of creative service and self-gratifying use, dialogically coordinated by representatives of associations of producers and consumers organised into political associations. As such, the longing for security experienced by individuals as a) alienated, individualised and exploited producers increasingly exposed to market fluctuations brought about by the flexibility of post-fordist regimes of accumulation, and b) consumers both seeking pleasure in standardised,<sup>32</sup> mass produced cultural goods, and increasingly exposed to the repressive mechanisms of the culture industry, is here said to be overcome by the democratic and cooperative re-organisation of subject-object relations *aimed at the institutionalisation of emancipation as the reconciliation of humanity and nature*. Libertarian socialism not only corresponds to a radically different relationship between humanity and nature, it also marks the advent of a new relationship between the individual and society, where the former engages with the latter as a realm of self-conscious practice.

The so-called “new” phase of capitalist development, usually defined as the neo-liberal age, and thought to emerge, at least partly, as a response to the demands of the artistic critique, has only been capable of translating creative autonomy into flexibility, and diffused new and sophisticated forms of control, thereby contributing to the

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<sup>32</sup> This search for pleasure in the consumption of cultural goods, Adorno argued, is motivated by a “[l]onging for a ‘feeling on safe ground’” and reflects “an infantile need for protection” characteristic of a “freely competitive society,” such as one underpinned by the principle of self-preservation. Adorno, T.W. “How to Look at Television,” p 161

increasing remoteness between individuals and society and the further degradation of the bonds between individuals themselves. As such, it marked the advent of the age of an apparent “anything goes” and ruthless individualism, both characterising the radicalisation of the principle of self-preservation. Whilst the role played by the artistic critique embodied in the critical theory of the Frankfurt School in the 1968 uprisings was somewhat undeniable, its divorce from the concerns characterising social critique and the absence of a clear formulation of its political orientations, made it incapable of providing individuals with the theoretical tools required for the development of a coherent political alternative both meeting the demands for justice and complementing resistance. Now equipped with the political orientations capable of guiding individuals towards the practical application of an alternative life in common approached from the standpoint of reconciliation, critical theory can finally be expected to play a role in shaping political life, and even contribute to the revival of political radicalism in an age whereby the discredited legacy of statist forms of socio-political alternatives, combined with an incapacity to move beyond the conception of autonomy as security, have led major political parties of the Left in Europe<sup>33</sup> to redefine themselves as allies to capitalist forces. The author of this thesis does not expect to solve all the existing problems with libertarian socialism, the critique of instrumental reason or the theory of communicative action elaborated by Habermas. The task has rather been one aimed at demonstrating that as a social and artistic critique oriented towards the practical realisation of a libertarian socialist institutional model, critical theory has a fresh and valuable role to play in both piercing the veil of, and challenging, the neo-liberal ideology permeating contemporary society.

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<sup>33</sup> The *Parti Socialiste* in France, the *Labour Party* in England, and the *Sozialdemokratische Partei* of Germany all have, for example, accepted the victory of capitalism over all other social forms, thereby effectively complying with the demands of capital accumulation.

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